Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

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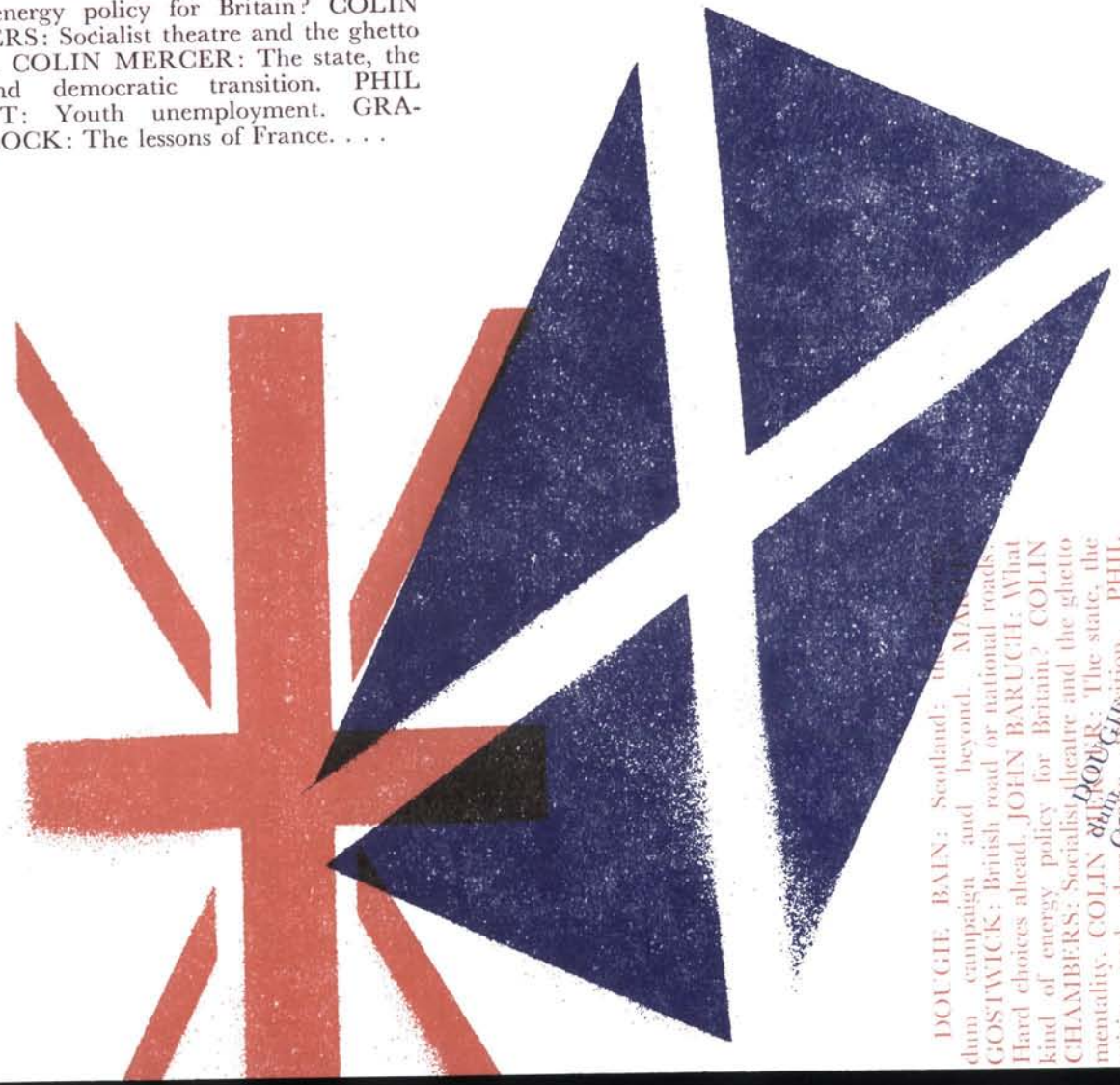
DOUGIE BAIN: Scotland: the referendum campaign and beyond. MARTIN GOSTWICK: British road or national roads? Hard choices ahead. JOHN BARUCH: What kind of energy policy for Britain? COLIN CHAMBERS: Socialist theatre and the ghetto mentality. COLIN MERCER: The state, the crisis, and democratic transition. PHIL BARNETT: Youth unemployment. GRAHAME LOCK: The lessons of France. . . .



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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

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Editor Martin Jacques

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Editorial Correspondence
Martin Jacques, 16 King Street, WC2E 8HY

Advertisements
Doris Allison, above address

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CONTENTS

	Editorial Comments	237
Dougie Bain	Scotland: The Referendum Campaign and Beyond	240
Colin Chambers	Socialist Theatre and the Ghetto Mentality	245
John Baruch	What Energy Policy for Britain?	251
Review: Colin Mercer	The State, The Crisis and Democratic Transition	256
Discussion: Phil Barnett	Youth Unemployment	260
Martin Gostwick	The British Road or National Roads? Hard Choices Ahead ..	263
Grahame Lock	The Lessons of France	267

Cover Designed by Mark Cyst

SOME ARTICLES PLANNED FOR FORTHCOMING ISSUES

Interview with Bob Wright	
Eric Hobsbawm	Developments in the British Working Class
Monty Johnstone	The Evolution of Communist Party Strategy
Robbie Gray	The State and Democratic Strategy

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Editorial Comments

THE TORY PARTY'S SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

An estimation of the Tories' "move to the right" must take as its main starting point, the Heath Government's head-on encounters with the trade union movement in 1972-74, and, for the Conservative Party, the catastrophic outcome of losing office, and not only losing it after one term, but before it was two-thirds completed.

One of the traumatic effects of that, for them, terrible and unprecedented defeat was that it caused them to repudiate in deep disenchantment Heath's attempt to construct a fully corporate state, in which the economic balance between the public and private sectors of industry, and the role which each played were firmly directed by Whitehall in partnership with the CBI and trade union leaders prepared to collaborate. Why, they even *nationalised* two important manufacturing concerns (UCS and Rolls Royce)! The *Private Eye* strip cartoon was the most accurate political satire of the period, with its bossy, no-nonsense management of "Great Britain Ltd." by Heath, Cabinet Secretary Sir William Armstrong and the faceless men of the Bank, the Treasury and Neddy. It was an administration whose methods and style left Tory activists, backbench MPs and even Cabinet ministers like Joseph and Thatcher as relatively unwanted observers from the sidelines, hopelessly fuming as it slid to disaster.

Heath's senior Cabinet ministers, Whitelaw, Prior, Howe, Carrington, Gilmour and Pym, are all still at the top in the Shadow Cabinet, and all still wish the party to stay in or near the "middle ground" of Westminster politics and policies, anxious that radical overhauling of the State and the economy in the interests of free enterprise and profit should not go beyond what can be carried with a cautious City and a big business preferring the structural "mix" as it is.

But Heath's men, the heirs and successors as consensus trimmers of Macmillan, Butler, Hailsham and MacLeod, no longer govern the party from above. Now they co-exist uneasily with a new leader of a new type, for in the uncompromising Mrs. Margaret Thatcher they have over them the representative of the constituency zealots, the real "true-blue" Tories. Unlike the Heathites, who believe it would be impossible to achieve, the zealots on the Right want the party once in power to re-create a Britain in which their class aspirations and outlook predominates as once it did, a toughly-disciplined society in its public and private behaviour, and in which the virtues of free enterprise, private property and social privilege operate untramelled.

Since Mrs. Thatcher's triumph in 1975, the activists in the constituency associations, the annual conference firebrands, and the MPs they have chosen for "the return to fundamentals" have ruled OK.

Actually, the process of building a fundamentalist Tory party had begun well before that, around 1970 with the launching of free-enterprise "Selsdon man" and continuing in spite of (or because of) Heath's 1971-72 U-turn to corporatism, with the choice almost unnoticed at the time, of ultra-Right candidates for the 1974 elections replacing those who had died, retired, or gone back into their businesses or professions. Out went many of the landed patricians, the top echelons of the City, the boardroom and the Bar, and in came the evangelical journalists, middle managers, chartered accountants, provincial lawyers, public relations promoters and industrial "consultants". There in the Commons were suddenly a veritable host of Fairbairns, Tebbits, Budgens, Wintertons, Gorsts and Gardiners, to join the monetarists and free enterprise hot gospellers already there like Joseph, Thatcher, Ridley, Biffen, Lawson & Co.

And when the Heath men suffered a fatal loss of nerve because of their master's typically intransigent refusal to stand down in the first ballot, the new breed was strong enough (146 MPs) to get Mrs. Thatcher in against hopelessly split opposition. They have called all the shots in Parliament since, with the Reform Group formed in response a fairly muted minority of about 60-80. Differences between the two camps run across the whole spectrum of economic and social policy, with many "reformers" favouring limited state intervention and subsidy, considerable public social spending, and leaving the NHS and comprehensive education more or less alone, though they share the bugbears

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of cutting tax and boosting defence. They want to "live with the trade unions", quite a few of them having taken out membership cards at Prior's prompting, although this can mean trying to undermine the TU policies and politics from within.

For the Thatcherites, "rolling back the frontiers of the State" means cutting back its tax revenues and its many corporations and holdings, thus leaving their profits, interest and rents in their pockets and enabling them and their supporters to their medium and small businesses as they see fit. The big conglomerates would be able to fend for themselves once dividend and price controls were taken away and they could shed their loss-making operations without interference. Profitable parts of the nationalised producing industries could be sold off, while the publicly-owned services could have their "monopolies" subjected to competition. The welfare state, too, could be turned into an arena of "competition and choice".

Far from being cautioned by the lessons of the 1974 defeat, it has only intensified the free marketeers' hatred of the Labour movement and thirst for revenge, epitomised most recently by the Ridley document proposing that a fight should be picked with one or two of the most militant, but vulnerable public sector unions, in order to break the whole movement's capacity for action.

The fundamentalists naturally recognise in the labour movement the one mass organisation which could stand in the way of their plans for a quite significant re-ordering of the State and society around free enterprise and an unchecked market economy.

But as the election approaches, Mrs. Thatcher herself has given Prior the go-ahead to try to appease the movement, or at least its leadership, in her search for a blend which will offer the electorate the apparent prospect of continued industrial peace, while she embarks on the "de-regulation" of the economy and the re-ordering of the State which she is convinced the public want provided this can be done without too much trouble and strife.

Should she fail in the task, her replacement and that of her camp at the head of the Tory Party could be swift, either with a compromise "re-unifying" candidate (Whitelaw), or by the re-emergence in complete control of the "middle-ground" consensus men, backed by the Reform Group, under someone like Prior or Pym. If she wins, the Thatcherites' determination to carry out "The Right Approach to the Economy" should not be under-estimated.

COMMUNIST PARTIES AND THE EEC

Only one of the Communist Parties of the nine Common Market countries—that of Ireland—is calling for a boycott of the proposed elections to the European Assembly, appealing for them to be turned into "a second referendum by withholding support from the whole facade".

In all probability the elections will be held in June of next year, between the 7th and the 10th. If Britain sticks to the traditional Thursday, that will mean June 7, though the day of the week is likely to be the only "traditional" feature of these elections. Nothing is more flexible than a Common Market deadline, and further postponement remains a possibility. Nevertheless the elected Assembly will probably be born next year and though as noted eight of the nine Communist Parties will be involved, the analyses of the EEC made by these Parties varies, as does the manner of their involvement in the elections.

Already in 1974 the Communist Parties of Western Europe noted the differences in the degree of integration of countries into the EEC, between those which were founder members and those which joined later. But there are also differing analyses of the implications of the process of integration and the possibility of the elected Assembly being part of a process of democratisation. In this short note we can do little more than point to some of these attitudes.

Giancarlo Pajetta of the Italian Communist Party states that his party "is determined to work from within to transform the Community. . . . The experience of these years has taught us that there are some vital sectors (monetary, energy, advanced technology, environment) in which the individual national states do not possess instruments to take the necessary measures in a satisfactory manner." He goes on to argue that this could be met by the "European Parliament if it had far wider powers than it has today", though also arguing "the national state must remain the decisive element".

An article from Jean der Bosch of the Belgian CP says that the EEC "was a response to certain objective factors—the realities of the internationalisation of the productive forces; that it was the response of the monopoly capitalists to these factors". He believes the EEC to be "irreversible" and

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therefore calls for its democratic revision. He says the Belgian Communists are against all new transfers of power to the Assembly, but see the elected Assembly as part of the process of democratisation of the EEC.

Dutch Communists in the report discussed at their Congress earlier in the year stress that "capitalism and the multinationals form an obstacle on the way to truly productive international economic relations". And further: "The effects of the EEC are apparent in the closing down of enterprises which results from capitalist concentration at EEC level and the purposeful promotion of West German interests. . . ." Dutch Communists will contest the elections in order to "protect Dutch national interests against every EEC attack".

That theme is emphasised by Danish Communists who will be contesting the elections as part of the Peoples Movement. Danish public opinion—as in Britain—shows strong feeling against the EEC, a recent poll showing less than 40 per cent in favour.

The attitude of the Communist Party of Great Britain has recently been restated in the pamphlet "Common Market Fraud". Here the importance of international co-operation is recognised for many problems, but "they do not exist only for the EEC states, and nor does their solution depend on the EEC".

Emphasis is placed on the reassertion of the full powers of each national parliament as the basis for real co-operation, and the need to fight for the alternative economic strategy.

It is clearly impossible to adequately cover all the points made by nine Communist Parties and we have deliberately not attempted to do so in this note. What is already apparent is the need for much more consideration of developments in Western Europe and inside the EEC, and we hope to return to this in future issues.

PROGRAMME OF THE GERMAN COMMUNIST PARTY (DKP)

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the German Communist Party (DKP) at the end of December last, the draft of a new Communist Party Programme was endorsed.[1] This, like our own draft of the *British Road to Socialism*, has been presented for discussion both inside and outside the Party in preparation for the Party Congress to be held in October, which will make a final decision with regard to it.

Unlike ours, the DKP programme is not concerned primarily with elaborating a detailed strategy for the advance to socialism. Following an analysis of the nature of our epoch as one of "transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale", of the special features of German monopoly capital today —the extraordinary concentration of capital and the wide merging of big business with the state—the present crisis of West German capitalism and the policies of all recent German governments to transfer its burdens on to the shoulders of the overwhelming majority of the people, the main emphasis is on ways and means of bringing about "a change to democratic and social progress, for peace and friendship between the peoples".

This is especially important in view of the advance of ultra-right forces in Western Germany (open emergence of former S.S. groupings and the establishment of young Nazi organisations) and the ever increasing attacks on living standards and democratic rights (*Berufsverbote*).

The social forces, the unification of which around such a programme is emphasised as a major task of the DKP are:

> "The workers and employees, technicians and scientists, teachers and artists, the peasants, artisans and tradespeople, students. They are the communists and social-democrats, liberals, Christians and democrats who belong to no party.

These are the forces which together we call the "broad democratic alliance" and which the German programme calls "the forces of anti-monopoly democracy".

The development of anti-monopoly democracy is linked directly with the perspective of the advance to socialism in Western Germany. A special section of the programme "Socialism, our Aim", is devoted to this and its approach is in general similar to that elaborated by other Communist Parties including our own. These are: the role which parliament will play, the election of a government which will legitimise fundamental social changes, the importance of combining parliamentary with extra-parliamentary struggle.

[1] Entwurf Programm der Deutschen Kommunistischen Partei.

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Scotland: The Referendum Campaign and Beyond

Dougie Bain

(*The author is the Glasgow Area Secretary of the Communist Party*)

At this point in time, the people of Scotland are closer to achieving their own parliament than at any other time in the past 270 years. If things go to plan, elections to an Edinburgh Assembly could take place as early as the spring of next year.

And yet, even at this advanced stage in the proceedings, the devolution ship will still have to negotiate a number of dangerous reefs—some in plain view, others submerged—before finally dropping anchor. One such submerged rock was the June 14 vote of confidence which the Government survived by a mere seven votes: defeat would have sent the Scotland Bill to join its many predecessors in Davy Jones' Locker.

The purpose of this article is, first of all, to consider in a fairly practical way what must be done to ensure that a Scottish parliament does in fact come into being next year, but, secondly, to open up for further discussion a number of deeper problems which will have to be resolved if the national movement in Scotland is to achieve its full potential.

THE REFERENDUM

The introduction of a referendum into the proceedings was of course nothing more than an ill-concealed attempt by the anti-devolutionists to delay and possibly block progress towards a Scottish parliament. Mindful of the success of the media in influencing the EEC referendum, there were probably hopes that a majority of the Scottish people could be prevailed upon to reject their own parliament. That the proposition had nothing to do with democracy was made quite clear by the further stipulation that 40 per cent of the electorate would have to vote *Yes* before Scotland would "qualify" for self-government.

But the referendum with its 40 per cent threshold is now a political fact and given the dangers and uncertainties of the period ahead, it assumes very great political significance.

Most obviously, the return of a Tory Government in an autumn election bitterly opposed to any form of devolution would endow the referendum with a life and death importance. It is unlikely, although possible, that a Thatcher Government would immediately repeal the Scotland Act but what is certain is that only a massive *Yes* vote in a subsequent referendum would put the Act beyond danger.

But even in the more favourable conditions of a Labour Government continuing in office, the fact remains that a majority of MPs are opposed to devolution and will exploit any weakness to scupper the Act. So, however unnecessary the referendum and however unjust the 40 per cent clause, the challenge that faces the national movement is clear; to win the overwhelming majority of the Scottish people to vote *Yes* in the referendum.

What Kind of Campaign

What is needed is a truly national campaign that will unite and mobilise the Scottish people as a whole around a *Yes* campaign. Three main elements will be critical to the development of such a movement.

First of all, it is vitally important that the Labour Movement should take the lead in the campaign. At its conference in April, the STUC not only reaffirmed its support for devolution, but agreed to campaign for a *Yes* vote. The STUC had already taken steps in this direction by participating in the setting up of the *Campaign for a Yes Vote* in January of this year. The Scottish Council of the Labour Party and the majority of Scottish Labour MPs are, at least formally, in support of the Government's devolution proposals, and, significantly, the two new Labour MPs returned at Garscadden and at Hamilton, although both on the right of the Party, made devolution a central plank in their campaigns.

But major political problems in relation to the national question still exist in the Labour Movement and this is an issue I shall return to later. Much of the support for devolution, particularly among Labour Party members, is limited to the short-term tactic of halting the electoral advance of the SNP. The set-backs suffered by the SNP in the by-elections and the Regional Elections has already convinced many in the Movement that the danger from the SNP is now all but past and that the Scotland Bill has served its purpose. Among such sections, there will be little enthusiasm for the referendum campaign.

On the one hand therefore, pro-devolutionists

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within the Labour Party and the trade union movement will have to work hard to ensure that all sections of the Movement play a full and active part in the campaign—the Scottish Council of the Labour Party, the constituency parties, the Co-op Movement, the STUC, the trade unions, the trades councils—and on the other hand the political and ideological argument must continue to win the Movement to understand the central importaance of the national question to the fight for democracy and left advance in Scotland.

The Communist Party in Scotland will have a key role to play in both regards but especially in carrying the political and ideological argument into the Movement. The Scottish Congress of the Party will take place in November and it is planned to make this a major public event which will have as its centre-piece a debate on the key political and strategic questions facing Scotland—the relationship of the national movement and the Scottish Assembly to the building of a broad democratic alliance in Scotland and the role of the Labour Movement within such an alliance.

The Other Forces

The second main element necessary to the referendum campaign is the involvement of all the main political, social, religious, cultural and leisure organisations of the Scottish people in working for a *Yes* vote. Here it is only possible to touch on the possibilities in this direction.

At its National Council meeting in June, the SNP overwhelmingly reaffirmed its support for a Scottish parliament as an important advance for the Scottish people. Margo McDonald represented the SNP at the inaugural meeting of the *Yes* Committee. The role of the SNP will obviously be of central importance to the *Yes* campaign and it is essential that the Labour Movement faces up to this fact, and works to achieve the best working relationship with the SNP. Inevitably, the SNP will use the referendum campaign to project the Assembly as a stepping-stone to independence, but this need not be prejudicial to achieving unity around the need to maximise the *Yes* vote.

Although the Tory Party under Thatcher has turned its back on Heath's Declaration of Perth, there still exists a considerable sympathy and support for devolution among Scottish Tories. Ironically, the present SNP was formed in 1934 as the result of the fusion of the National Party of Scotland and the Scottish Party which was a breakaway from the Cathcart Conservative Association—a fact which Teddy Taylor, the present MP for Cathcart, probably prefers to forget! Whether constituency parties could be persuaded to come out in open support is doubtful, but certainly a number of influential figures in the Tory Party will be considering their position in relation to the campaign.

In 1884, the Convention of Royal Burghs organised a great demonstration in Edinburgh to demand the creation of a full Secretary of State for Scotland and this was granted by Gladstone the following year. Scottish Burghs, either individually or through the Convention, have been consistent supporters of devolution over a long period of time. It is important in the context of the referendum campaign that the Regional, District and Community Councils declare their positions on the issue and are won to play a part in the campaign.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, along with the Scottish Trades Union Congress, stands as one of the great forums of the Scottish people and indeed, in the absence of a Scottish Parliament, the Assembly at an earlier period took on some of the functions of a parliament. The Assembly has always supported devolution, and at its meeting this year again confirmed its continuing support.

This will provide the basis for approaching the kirks, presbyteries and the strongly supported Womens Guilds of the Church, as well as, of course, seeking the help of the Catholic Church and the other religious organisations of Scotland.

One of the most striking features of the SNP has been the mass support given to it by the youth of Scotland. The *Yes* campaign must aim to capture this great reservoir of idealism and enthusiasm by finding the appropriate forms for involving young people. One possibility would be to encourage a separate and independent Youth & Student Campaign for a *Yes* Vote comprising the main political, trade union and social youth organisations.

Beyond these few suggestions the list of possible initiatives is limitless. Thousands of other community, cultural and sporting organisations from the tenants associations to the Scottish Shinty Association could be won to take a stand on this issue.

Finally, as well as seeking the affiliations and support of Scottish society, it will be essential to generate mass activity by the people in the campaign. Above all this means establishing a network of campaign committees at grass roots level and coordinating these into a national campaign. As well as mounting an imaginative public campaign of demonstrations, rallies, concerts, debates it will also be necessary in the closing stages to bring to bear all the experience of the political parties in carrying through a detailed canvass of the *Yes* vote.

Some Implications

Of course the reality will fall somewhat short of the kind of perspective sketched in above, but a vital part of the *leading* role of the Labour Movement will be to project the concept of a national movement and to spell out the enormous potential

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of support that exists. Indeed, it is the extent to which the Labour Movement can take the initiative not only in arguing for such an alliance, but in being its main architect that will decide its capacity for leadership. What is at issue is the political capacity of the Scottish Labour Movement to exercise a hegemonic role in relation to the national question. All the conditions exist for bringing into being *one form*, or *one manifestation of*, the broad democratic alliance—an alliance which will of course have to be confirmed again and again in many forms and around many issues as the intricate fabric of a new political-democratic consciousness is woven.

A successful referendum campaign could have a number of important implications for the Scottish Assembly which followed. First of all, and most importantly, it could bring about the political isolation of the Tory Party in Scotland. While Margaret Thatcher could be right in her calculation that an anti-devolutionist position could bring political dividends in England, there can be little room for doubt that it poses serious problems for Scottish Tories. The *No* Campaign will be a difficult furrow to plough and even more thorny will be the position of Tory candidates in standing for an Assembly they have already done their damnest to abort.

The corollary to the isolation of the right in Scotland, could be the strengthening of those forces in the SNP who have a more realistic view of the process by which Scotland will win her national rights and who recognise the need for an alliance with the Labour Movement. Within this grouping are those who would describe themselves as socialists. The possibility of a dialogue between the SNP and the Labour Movement then opens up as to the next steps that need to be taken in extending devolution.

Which brings me to the last point. The powers of a Scottish Assembly as prescribed by the Scotland Bill are totally inadequate and battle will have to be joined once again on the devolution issue. An overwhelming *Yes* vote will legitimise demands for additional powers to be devolved.

SOME LONG-TERM PROBLEMS

It would be tempting at this point to speculate further on the political character of Scotland's first parliament in 271 years and to discuss some of the pressing social and economic problems that will need to be tackled by its 150 brand new MPs.

However, it is clear from the discussion on the referendum campaign that the further development of a national-democratic movement in Scotland will raise a number of important issues and, at this stage, it might be valuable at least to identify some of these. One area of difficulty is the historic failure of the Labour Movement to give leadership in the fight for national rights and another relates to need the to come to terms with the presence of a powerful nationalist force in Scottish politics.

(a) The Labour Movement and the National Question

Much more thought needs to be given to the deep political and ideological problems which are at present inhibiting the Labour Movement from fully coming to terms with the national question. This is not an abstract question; in a very real sense the dramatic developments of the past 15 years in Scottish politics can be traced to this central political weakness.

The fact that all kinds of resistances will be encountered in winning the Movement to fully commit itself in the referendum campaign is not a function of any organisational weakness but of a failure to appreciate the importance of the national question.

And the problem won't go away. For many in the Movement, the Scottish Assembly was a concession to "nationalist" feeling in Scotland and one which hopefully would remove the issue once and for all from the political scene. Consequently any attempt to extend the powers of the Assembly will inevitably be received with suspicion and hostility. In such circumstances it will not be difficult for the SNP to retain its position in the eyes of the Scottish people as the true champion of national rights, and at the same time to characterise the attitude of the Movement as unprincipled and opportunist.

Not a New Problem

While it is true that hostility to the SNP in Labour Party circles has reached almost hysterical dimensions, it would be wrong to see the problem we are discussing as simply a defensive over-reaction to the electoral threat posed by the SNP. The fact is that, throughout its history, the Labour Party in Scotland has displayed an ambivalent attitude to the national question.

In the early years of the century, the flag was carried by the Liberal-dominated Scottish Home Rule Association (SHRA) and, indeed, the question of Home Rule for Scotland was debated, in one form or another, no fewer than 15 times between 1889 and 1914 and in that period four Bills were introduced into Parliament. The emerging Labour Party gave its support to the SHRA. Ramsay McDonald was for a time secretary of the London branch of the Association and Keir Hardie also gave active support. After the First World War the SHRA was re-formed with the Labour Movement the dominant force. In 1916, the STUC passed a motion in favour of Home Rule and the ILP and the Co-op Movement added their support to the demand. In the General Election of 1918, the Scottish Council of the Labour Party made Home Rule a central plank in its

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Manifesto and in the same year the Scottish Miners affiliated to the Home Rule Association. But this was the high point of the Movement's involvement, and in 1924, Ramsay McDonald declared, as Prime Minister, that while he personally was in favour of Home Rule his Cabinet was opposed and no action was taken on the issue. In the years that followed this rebuff, the issue was gradually dropped by the Movement leaving the Communist Party to keep alive the Movement's earlier commitment.

It was the failure of the Home Rule movement and its abandonment by the Labour Movement that led to the formation of the Scottish Party in 1928 and the Scottish National Party in 1934 although at this point these organisations acted mainly as pressure groups and joint membership with other political parties was allowed.

The second main phase of Labour Movement involvement occurred during the 1940s. During the War the Scottish Convention Association was formed out of a split in the SNP. Led by John McCormack, one of the major nationalist figures of the time, the Association sponsored a Scottish National Assembly in 1947 which was attended by 400 representatives from all the main political parties, the churches, the trade unions, community and cultural organisations. Its Report of Proceedings hailed it as "the largest and most widely representative meeting ever held in Scotland."

The Labour Movement responded to the initiative. The Scottish Labour Party included the call for a Scottish Parliament in its 1945 election manifesto, and the Movement was heavily involved in the ensuing Covenant campaign which attracted two and a half millions signatures demanding devolution of power to a Scottish Parliament. But the post-war Labour Government was unmoved by it all and confined its response to a White Paper suggesting a minor extension of the scope of the Scottish Grand Committee.

Once again a political vacuum opened up. The Convention Association lost its impetus and Labour Movement commitment declined leaving the SNP as the only identifiable nationalist force in Scottish politics. The failure of the Covenant campaign had hardened opinion in the SNP; a Party now convinced that pressure group tactics had failed and that the main political parties would have to be challenged at the polls; a Party impatient with the devolutionary process and determined to go all out for independence.

Why the Problem?

So while the Scottish Labour Party has, from time to time, responded to the national aspirations of the Scottish people, its British counterpart has consistently resisted any moves to devolve power to a Scottish Parliament—a position only reluctantly abandoned when its very existence was threatened by the SNP onslaught in the late 1960s.

Clearly the root problem must be traced to the dominant political philosophy of British Labourism. Heavily compromised by the imperial, great power chauvinist outlook of the Establishment, the British Labour leaders have been resistant to any proposal which seemed to threaten the political and economic unity of the United Kingdom.

The Labour Party in Scotland, unable to break with this outlook, has failed to develop its own national—democratic perspective for Scotland. Dominated by the "regionalist" outlook of the Westminster—St. Andrew's House axis, it remains locked in a narrow parochialism without any real national identity. Strongly committed to social and economic reform but without a wider political perspective, the leaders of the Labour Party in Scotland have seen devolution as irrelevant to the problems of Scotland.

As far as the Left in the Movement is concerned, it is tempting to suggest that the dominant "great power" outlook has been rationalised into the priority of maintaining the unity of the working class. What is certain is that this simplistic, "trade unionist" perception of unity reflects a failure to understand the essentially democratic character of the struggle for national rights and this in turn is linked to the wider question of the relationship between democracy and socialism.

So the problem cannot be resolved simply at a Scottish level. The British Labour Movement must be won to a fuller appreciation of the national question not just as a favour to Scotland and Wales, but as a vital part of the wider struggle to extend the democratic rights of the British people as a whole. The specific issue of the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales inevitably raises the more fundamental question of the decentralisation of political and economic power and the restructuring of the state.

How to Win the Movement

Flowing from the above point, perhaps the most effective way of convincing the British Labour Movement of the political relevance of devolution is to widen the demand. It is not just Wales and Scotland that stand to benefit from a greater control over their own affairs. The Left have already warned of the dangerous tendency to bureaucracy and the over-centralisation of power in Britain, and yet the full implications of what the Welsh and Scots have achieved have not been capitalised on sufficiently by the Left. Let the demand for devolution be raised from Cornwall to Yorkshire. The "English Problem" will never be resolved in a vacuum but only in the context of growing pressure

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from the people for a greater control over their own lives.

As far as the Labour Movement in Scotland is concerned, the winning of a Scottish Assembly takes the movement for national rights to a new stage. The Labour Party will almost inevitably have a substantial majority and therefore the Movement will find itself carrying the main responsibility for Scotland—her problems and her aspirations—in a totally new way.

The key, therefore, to developing the hegemonic role of the Labour Movement will lie in the elaboration of policies to meet the social, economic, democratic and cultural needs of the people, and to the extent to which the Labour Movement asserts itself as the leading force in the fight for a better Scotland.

It is a matter of some urgency, therefore, for the Left to begin to formulate policies that will form the basis of a national-democratic alliance based on the Labour Movement.

On the social and economic front, it will be necessary to develop the "alternative economic policy" into an economic plan for Scotland covering not only our main industries, but also agriculture, crofting, fisheries, forestry, land use, craft industry, tourism and so on. Of course with the limited powers made available to the Assembly, it will not be possible to tackle these adequately and the practical necessity of further devolution of powers will become all too apparent.

Similarly in terms of the social services, it will prove impossible for the Assembly to meet the demands of the local authorities without access to further sources of revenue. The Government could find itself faced with a powerful alliance between the Assembly and the Regional and District Authorities demanding an end to the block grant system.

But policy should not be confined to the material needs of the people. The Labour Movement should seek to carry through the democratic transformation of Scottish society: industrial democracy, reform of the Scottish legal system, the devolution of the civil service, reform of the penal system, the police, the fight against sex discrimination and so on.

Finally, although not translatable into simple policy terms, the Movement must champion the arts in Scotland. In the past year, the STUC and the Scottish Arts Council have co-operated in a number of cultural projects and this patronage must be extended and developed.

(b) The Scottish National Party

It is the involvement of the Movement in all the varied aspects of Scottish life that will bring it to a new and deeper understanding of the national question. It is that understanding of its *national role* that will equip the working class for government.

For 15 years the Labour Party in Scotland has been hypnotised by the meteoric growth of the SNP —impotent in the face of a frenzied onslaught which, at one stage, threatened virtually every Labour seat in Scotland. In the early 1960s, it is estimated that the SNP numbered no more than 2,000 scattered among 50 odd branches; by 1968 it had grown to a staggering 100,000 organised in 500 very enthusiastic branches.

The Left is still inclined to explain away the phenomenon as a "protest" vote—a powerful rejection not only of years of Labour failure, but also of the straightjacket of the two-party system of British politics.

Certainly this was the soil which nurtured the phenomenon but it is only part of the explanation. The fact has also to be acknowledged that the people of Scotland rose up and demanded their national rights.

Nor is it all that surprising that the SNP should have been "chosen" as the vehicle for this upsurge in national sentiment. One element of the disillusionment with the Labour Party was its failure to fight for Scotland's rights. The SNP was heir to a nationalist tradition that had played an honourable role in the fight for self-government over 30 years. The SNP argument that political leverage would only be obtained when the nationalists were able to challenge the main parties at the polls could be substantiated historically; what two and a half million signatures failed to achieve in the 1940s was very rapidly forthcoming when 11 constituencies had fallen to the SNP.

But hope springs eternal and already the comparatively minor set-backs suffered by the SNP at Garscadden and Hamilton have convinced the Labour Party that a crazy interlude in Scottish politics is coming to an end and that things will return to the old well-worn rut. This reflects a continuing refusal to face up to what has happened in the past decade. It is time that the Movement came to terms with the fact that, for the foreseeable future anyway, the SNP is here to stay.

The SNP's "Historic Compromise"

Ever since its foundation, the NPS and later the SNP have been torn between the "home rulers" and the "fundamentalists" who have argued for independence and against co-operation with the "English Parties". When John McCormack and his followers broke from the SNP in 1942, they left behind a Party dominated by the "fundamentalists". However as the SNP has grown in size and been faced with the realities of political struggle, its ultra position has been considerably modified and the present position can be described as a kind of "historic compromise". On the one hand, the Party still firmly adheres to its ultimate goal of indepen-

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dence but, on the other, it accepts devolution as an important step in the right direction.

The fact that the SNP sees independence as the culmination of a devolutionary process provides the basis, in my view, for opening a dialogue with them. After all, the Communist Party's *British Road to Socialism* sets no limit to the devolutionary process and stresses that the unity of Britain "can only be based on the principle of voluntary co-operation between the three nations". Clearly the immediate demands of the Movement for the further devolution of power to a Scottish Assembly need now to be related to a longer-term perspective of self-government.

Where to Now for the Nationalists?

It would be fairly accurate to say that support for the SNP has been based on its position on devolution and independence rather than the mish-mash of policies it has accumulated over the past ten years. With the arrival of the Scottish Assembly, however, the question of policy becomes of central importance and it will be much more difficult for the Party to maintain its "neither Left nor Right" position. Eric Hobsbawm is right when he warns that "anyone who thinks the SNP would readily let itself be transformed into something like a socialist party is whistling in the dark"[1] but nevertheless, the Labour Movement must endeavour to influence the balance of forces within the SNP by seeking to draw the Nationalists in alliance on all the main social and democratic issues of the day.

[1] Eric Hobsbawm "On The Break-up of Britain", in *New Left Review*, 105.

Socialist Theatre and the Ghetto Mentality[1]

Colin Chambers

(*The author is the drama critic of the* Morning Star)

INTRODUCTION

When people refer to political theatre often they mean the non-aligned socialist touring groups, like Belt and Braces, Red Ladder or 7:84, which form a distinct part of the alternative theatre movement that grew up in the late 60s, promoting a new set of values both in the conditions and in the content of their work. This is an understandable view, given the ties the groups developed with the organised labour movement in inspiration, venues, sponsorship, subject-matter and its research (especially during the years of opposition to the Heath Government and immediately after). But a broader-based analysis would reveal a much greater breadth, depth and diversity of progressive work in the theatre and in the way theatre works politically.

Such a perspective would take account of, and could show the relationship between theatre work at all levels, particularly in the subsidised theatre, embracing the very different work of, for example, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Sheffield Crucible and the Broadside Mobile Workers Theatre.

Nevertheless, a sectarianism in how both theatre and politics are seen still persists on the left which erects a "them" and "us" barrier that serves to foster a "ghetto mentality". This creates problems for understanding the relationship between the work of the touring groups and the rest of theatre activity, and is therefore a hindrance to the development of both.

Re-examination

Yet as we enter a new phase which marks the "working through" of the 60s counter-culture explosion and of associated economic and political factors, the need for a re-examination is being felt more acutely by the Left, and within the socialist theatre groups there is a questioning of their direction and type of work, a search for a strategy and for the development of theory. This questioning is not simply the result of an economic squeeze, but is also a product of the weakness of political and industrial mobilisation in the wake of the social

[1] A debate is taking place in various journals like *Leveller*, *Socialist Review* and *Wedge* and amongst left theatre workers (as at the Communist Party Arts and Leisure Committee's "Theatre and Marxism" Conference last September) on the direction of socialist theatre. This article is a contribution to that discussion.

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contract. While the trade union movement, which has always maintained a concern for culture, is engaged, as it is now, in protracted and difficult struggles on other fronts, it is less willing and able to engage on the cultural front. For a group like Foco Novo, which produced "The Arthur Horner Show" and "The Nine Days and Saltley Gates", this meant, for example, difficulty in keeping its trade union bookings and a change in philosophy away from the labour movement.

Cultural Environment

In looking for a new model, the touring groups are now having to tackle in a new way and with a new urgency some basic questions that have arisen over ten or so years of sacrifice, struggle and discovery. Despite being tinged with an independent, puritan ethic familiar on the Left ("less money, more effort, better politics") this fight expressed a courageous dignity and established a commitment to collective, democratic values, as well as firmly placing politics on the agenda of the theatre, and theatre firmly on the agenda of politics. While these questions are being asked, the gains of this hard life in the back of a touring van have to be defended and extended—hence the problem of strategy in the new and more complex context where the groups are being forced to confront the cultural environment of which they are just one small part. They are having to attract people to their declared position in a diverse entertainment world of "Coronation Street", women's magazines, rock and opera, that is split between forms developed profitably through technological advance, like the music business, and those constrained by their conditions of existence to stay as "minority" and as an acquired taste, like much live theatre.

RED LADDER

In this article it is impossible to examine the whole field, but in the context of the two main points, the left "ghetto" and the cultural environment the groups are embedded in (whether the groups see it like that or not), an instructive example is that of Red Ladder, one of the best known of the touring companies.

It has consistently kept clear of the "establishment" theatre, moving its headquarters from London to Leeds, and has developed with the times from the early arts lab days when it was called the Agitprop Street Players to its current and most sophisticated show, "Taking Out Time". As with other groups, like Monstrous Regiment, Belt and Braces or 7:84 (7 per cent of the population owns 84 per cent of the wealth), the name indicates the approach, which in Red Ladder's case has developed from its work on "classical" agitprop linked to a political campaign (for example the fight against the Industrial Relations Act) through a powerfully original form of issue-based agitprop (for example, on sexism), to a less successful stab at cabaret for working men's clubs, and now "Taking Our Time", a history play but with obvious contemporary relevance.

Researched with the help of prominent Marxist historians, Dorothy and Edward Thompson, it is a "local" play set in Yorkshire in 1842 at the time of the Plug Riots against the introduction of the power loom. The story concerns a family of weavers at this point of social, political and economic transition.

Collective Process

The play is performed by nine people who, as with most touring groups, fall within a narrow and young age band, double roles and play instruments. It was collectively written and is changed as the tour progresses, if need be. This collective process, and all that it means—control over your working conditions and relations of work, over your tools and the product, which is not a commodity to be hawked around managements, the breaking down of the division of labour both between functions, like acting, directing, building the set, and between roles, women's and men's—is one of the main attractions of the socialist groups and ties in with their wider aims of taking new plays to new audiences in new venues.

For many people, seeing such a show might be the first time they have come across "theatre" in their adult lives, especially as many areas are starved of live entertainment, or, for those who have been to a theatre, it might be the first time it has meant anything to them beyond just having a good time. These "new recruits" are the main reason for Red Ladder's work, which is why such a premium is placed on having a discussion with the audiences afterwards.

"Taking Our Time" reflects increased attention to characterisation, and therefore to a more complex dialogue, within a more conventional narrative based on the prevailing "realistic" form of drama, and a bolder overall structure that contains devices like a play within a play that belongs to a theatrical tradition Red Ladder has previously not drawn on. Yet within Red Ladder's ambitious project there is a conflict that holds back the desired development. This tension is found in the relationship between the group's political commitment and the demands of making a play that "works"—that is an aesthetic commitment, or to put it crudely, centres on the argument that it is OK to get the art wrong if you get the politics right.

Agitprop

Despite its sophistication as a full-length "play", "Taking Our Time" is still agitprop, but without the directness and clarity afforded by the archetypes of a

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20-minute agitational piece. Like Red Ladder's early agitprop work, it is still designed to illuminate a contemporary struggle—and it is that which forms its political commitment. Here, it is the "new technology" and "rationalisation" being introduced at the expense of the workers and causing high unemployment, the political nature of personal and economic struggle, and the need to fight wage cuts which are being sold under the flag of "all pull together".

But apart from a few scenes (like the one on a roof) "Taking Our Time" needs a stronger internal dynamic to generate the tensions, the conflicts, the surprises that make such a play "work" (that is the aesthetic commitment). There is a lack of inquiry, revelation and discovery in the way the narrative unfolds to reach what you experience as a predetermined end, and yet we all know "who dunnit" in "Hamlet", but we can still return to the play many times. The judgments are received as given rather than being argued out, which, because the play's main function is to provide a gloss to a debate about today, makes the politics predictable, lose conviction and the power to persuade or move. The "relevance" should be felt through the effect of the artistic experience which is made up of many elements, from the nature of the audience to the text, the venue and the sort of performance given. All of these have their own artistic values and make up.

Central Concern

The point is that Red Ladder has shifted the distinguishing feature of its activity as a theatre group —that is performing plays—to peripheral, though nonetheless socially crucial, concerns which are politically important to the members of the group. These other concerns, like political and social education and action, are part of a wider process that is also the province more directly of national and local government and the work of political parties and pressure groups.

This shift produces contradictions in the show. For example, an artistic requirement for the sort of play undertaken is recognised in the need to focus in a specific and "human" way the traumas of all the changes in values and in the conditions and pace of life. Yet to avoid the pitfalls of interpreting history through the psychology of individuals, as most plays tend to, the scope for making the characters "live" is limited by framing and distancing devices which also ensures a clear road for and the prominence of the political view the group wants to convey.

Overall, "Taking Our Time" is less "closed" than the Red Ladder's earlier work, but the way the political aim of the play marked and confined the whole process of creation has produced a show which, judging by the project, is still following a model the group's aspirations have left behind.

TOURING GROUPS

Many of the problems met by Red Ladder in its attempt to develop and adjust to the current political situation are shared by the other touring groups, though each has a different history, perspective and approach. However, there is one important common feature, to varying degrees implicit or articulated, that relates to the way they, and some of the people who have worked with them, see their problems and therefore of how to solve them. It is not a problem confined to the theatre. It is at root a theoretical question of how the groups see theatre as a function of their conception of class—a conception largely formed under the impact of an upsurge of interest in Marxist ideas among students in the 60s, combined with the influence of counter-culture lifestyle ideas. On the basis of seeing contradictions in society as direct expressions of the labour/capital antagonism, those who work in the socialist companies have tended to interpret all their tasks in terms of simple opposition.

For example, theatre, a word meaning both a building and a cultural institution as well as a complex mixture of different, diverse and contradictory activities, with its (and their own) history and conditions of existence and development, was and still is seen in terms of this "them" and "us" division. This narrow view of theatre reflects a similarly narrowing view of politics and of the forces that can play a role in political change.

Some of the groups saw, and see, themselves as the bastions of the new world from which individuals, especially the writers who because of the subsidy arrangements were in a more vulnerable position and also because of the nature of their craft, might make guerrilla raids into the "enemy camp", hopefully to return unscathed. Although the fear of crossing over to the "other side" and of being "incorporated" has partly been broken down as exchange between the two areas increases, there remains a justifiable scepticism, particularly when established managements use the alternative circuit like a vast audition to pick up the next generation of lively youngsters.

"Them" and "Us"

The "them" and "us" split becomes a self-fulfilling analysis by posing the problem in terms of theatre being a "minority" art and consigning the majority to the wrong side of the barricade. It lumps together the drama most people see, on television or in the cinema or at the panto, with work by writers like Bond or Griffiths with a pronounced socialist intent. It denies the Left any influence over the production of popular plays, whether of Shakespeare or Ayckbourn, through an underestimation of the weight of theatre in the cultural life of Britain, reflected in the space the "quality" press give to it

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and in its worldwide significance.

The effects of such crude divisions were cushioned during the period when militancy coincided with an expansion of subsidy and a shared commitment between audience and performer carried the day. But this is no longer the case, despite continuing sterling support among some sections of the Left for this immensely important "self-activity" of the Left. Yet here, the issues must and are being raised, as they are more sharply in the strictly "theatre world" of how to resolve the problems thrown up in all the areas of the touring groups' work.

The way the conception of the labour/capital antagonisms and the reduction of other problems into simple opposites affects these different areas of work takes many forms, each with its own set of contradictions, both in the internal organisation and functioning of the groups, and in their external relations to their own audiences, as well as to the rest of theatre and other areas of life.

Most of the people in the groups at first rejected traditional forms of political action, and no party maintained its own theatre group. Work in a theatre company was often substituted for other political work, though the plays the groups were performing frequently urged the need to organise. However, the alternative did throw up its own organisations (performers in ITC/TACT, administrators in IMOFTA and writers in TWU) and Equity now recognises the "fringe".

Labour's failure in 1964 and 1966, May 1968 or the miners' strike shifted the consciousness of the groups in a zig-zag path of generally writing off the labour movement in 1968 in favour of students or youth, or a vague anarchist or libertarian appeal to action, and then over-estimating the trade union movement under Heath, usually from a point of view associated with the Trotskyist-inspired groups, while underplaying other organisations and sections.

The need politically to legitimise work in the theatre was reinforced by a guilt about being involved in a "minority" cultural form that was also "art"—which is so often seen as being dissociated from politics. Hence the importance of the discussion after the play and the resistance to making the "art", the play, the key focus of a group's activity. The discussion helped to put the play in a wider context as part of a process, and to break down the performers' sometimes mystifying professional ethos, and cross the gulf between performer and audience. People were also helped to form their own theatre groups.

Audience

The "minority" aspect was also wrongly posed in terms of sociology. However mobile you are, you can never reach a numerical majority. A new audience was sought of mainly non-theatre-going factory workers it seemed, and though members of traditional trade unions saw some of the socialist groups during the militant period, in general the audiences were made up of people described as the new social forces in *The British Road*. Only a strategy that underplays the role of alliances and blocs can ignore the importance of building this kind of new audience.

As far as audiences go, the groups' often utopian aims had already been achieved through the mass medium of TV programmes like "Coronation Street". But it is impossible to label audiences accurately. However, this new audience at different times and places has certainly been made up of those who never go to the theatre, those who do but don't connect the work of the touring groups with what they otherwise see (maybe a panto or West End comedy), and those who are "theatre goers" or generally interested in culture. To play to these people is not to play to the converted, as it is sometimes caricatured. However labelled, audiences are not of one mind (i.e. converted), except in very precise conditions like opposing a factory closure, and even if they are, they still need confirmation and celebration of their own and other people's struggles which theatre can uniquely provide.

Another reaction of the groups, like the General Will in Bradford, was to turn to cabaret and use variety forms, a tactic already used in the "establishment" theatre in places like the Royal Court. Mostly the forms were outdated, and their use was largely sustained because the audiences often shared similar images of what "working class" cultural forms were. But it did work sometimes. A good example is the 7:84 show of John McGrath's "The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil", based on a strong and surviving local cultural form, the ceilidh in the Scots highlands. This shows that the touring groups cannot and do not ignore the educational differences and cultural habits and traditions in the different parts of Britain they travel to.

Internal Organisation

Internally the groups pursued the collective ideal, sometimes as a microcosm of the future socialist society full of democracy and equality. But advances in equal pay and non-hierarchical structure couldn't overcome discrimination in jobs and sex (hence the importance of Monstrous Regiment which has a majority of women members). Direct democracy in some form is necessary for small, touring groups, but the most articulate and long-serving would often dominate, and continuity between shows was difficult, especially as grants were often given for projects of several plays and personnel would change from one to another. Democratisation of skills sometimes meant insufficient attention to technique, though this has changed through

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experience and with the influx of trained professionals who found it difficult to get work and/or did not like the conditions of the "mainstream" theatre which is still competitive, dominated by TV, and a market jungle despite some pockets of relative calm in the subsidised world. But this is still a world of contracts and star ratings, where the director of the National Theatre, who is paid out of public money, does not disclose his salary.

None of these observations about the socialist touring groups in any way undervalues the contribution made by them, and the writers that have worked with them, to the theatre and to politics, to changing the attitudes of political parties and unions, and to changing our notions of art. Although many of the ideas can be found in the 30s, they were not present on such a scale or with such effect. But equally, none of the changes is the exclusive property of the Left either, which has tended to ignore or reject the work of those not openly committed to a revolutionary politics and has stressed one strand of history, like the Workers Theatre Movement, Unity Theatre or Joan Littlewood, at the expense of others like the people's theatre movement, Miss Horniman and the rep system, Lillian Baylis, George Devine, the tradition of the experimental clubs before and after the war or the breakthrough of theatres like the Royal Shakespeare Company.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

To redress the balance and see where the socialist touring groups fit into the history of the theatre as well as into the alternative trend within theatre would take several volumes of *Marxism Today*. You would need to look at the major developments in the British and world political and theatrical scene that helped create the conditions out of which came the 60s alternative explosion. You would need to examine the nature and scope of subsidy which helped shape and develop the regional theatres as well as the touring groups (while also allowing some to go under). You would also need to assess counter culture and its impact in forcing general redefinitions, including that of theatre, to embrace not just TV and radio work, summer shows and pantos, but also circuses, mime, dance, puppets, rock concerts and "happenings".

In particular you would have to disentangle the overlapping trends within the alternative and the fringe (implying adjunct as against a new system of values and meanings) and what made each tick at different moments in their development; those based on political challenge, whether socialist, feminist, gay, black, Irish, etc.; those based on community, where groups would form around a place that once had an identity but was losing it because of urban break-up; those based on education, traditionally linked to theatre, in the wake of new ideas in an expanding comprehensive system, spanning movements in Youth Theatre and Theatre-in-Education; those based on "art" but in opposition to prevailing ideas of art, more concerned with form and style, either in a physical tradition with an anti-rational, anti-verbal stress on body movements and sounds, often cynical, pretentious and decadent but also daring, perceptive and radical. Trends in monopoly publication of plays and the growth of alternative sources and distribution, the spread of workshops and the plays from the alternative that keep them going and allow unprecedented experiment, the student festivals and small-scale work would also need to be looked at, along with a thousand and one other things.

PROBLEM OF THE PLAY AND OF ART

But among those other factors which provide the background to the current critical stage in the development of the touring groups, one stands out as needing particular attention—that is the realm of art itself. More and more work on this by Marxists is being done and discovered, but still many theatre practitioners get no further than Brecht.

In rejecting what seems to be a predominantly right-wing or apolitical view of art practised by "them", there is a tendency for "us" to deny or certainly undervalue the importance of artistic qualities, except when overtly didactic (the false divide of "politics right—art wrong") and its more sophisticated versions of art as a weapon, or as a minor frill—ironically the very view the groups did so much to challenge on the traditional Left and in the unions. The distinctive quality of theatre, as opposed to TV, is thereby collapsed into its political effect, with all other effects, or eroticism or humour or satire being subordinated to it. Artistic criticism is then often countered by the sort of response which says "We can't be judged by the same standards as the Old Vic, we're into something different." This reaction may well be justifiable in the face of some hostile right wing attacks and be encouraged by the way the Arts Council gives its grants.

But such a defensive attitude fails to tackle the difficult problem of defining those elements of theatre which can be generalised regardless of form—that is, some common features or qualities shared by all sorts of plays that help them communicate with an audience, that make them "work", that make them pleasurable to watch, or that give them their sensuality as a distinctive experience. For example, in Wesker's trilogy, you find this in the way the play is structured, in the rhythms and control of mood and emotion, both through the dialogue and through what is not said.

Artistic Quality

This quality is not something that exists auto-

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matically (or only) in "them" and therefore is of no interest to "us". It is something that changes with the times and is different in each period for each form. The language of agitprop is different from the language of opera, but in both there is an artistic quality historically determined that a particular text or production succeeds in expressing and capturing to one degree or another.

It is not a simple, undifferentiated quality, but rather a set of relationships. To take it seriously is not to emphasise gesture at the expense of meaning or to put form above content or to deny the importance and determining role of content, but to try and get the relationships right between the many elements that make up a play and its performance, all of which involve many considerations, including the political. For example, the RSC's productions of "Coriolanus" and "Henry VII, Part Two" are unconvincing because while appearing to introduce a class element, do so to the detriment of the "common people" who are presented as mentally defective and suffering from speech impediments.

The problems for the socialist groups is that having broken with the prevailing forms of theatre, a vacuum is created which is difficult to fill—and this often happens with forms derivative of a narrow tradition of "political" work, like the Brecht-Weill type songs used in "Taking Our Time". The resources needed to generate and sustain new forms are either missing or only in embryo, and the task is even harder as the political situation moves rightward. Forms have to be developed that use the "cultural vocabulary" of the day while taking that vocabulary forward, going beyond the assumptions which sustain contemporary cultural activity that are usually in contradiction to the assumptions of the Left.

Socialist Perspective

Plays that fall within a socialist perspective which have expressed in a satisfactory and satisfying way this artistic quality and which have "worked" on stage can be found in different forms whether documentary-based or fictional; like "The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs" adapted by David Edgar and presented by the RSC, "The Ballygombeen Bequest" by John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy presented by 7:84 or their "Non-Stop Connolly Cycle", which is an example of a non-naturalistic epic form covering a sweep of history and introducing a new way of dealing with the "hero", in this case a revolutionary, Trevor Griffiths' "The Comedians", using the familiar form of the stand-up comic in "established" theatres to subvert our idea of how humour works and show that it is not neutral.

There is also great potential in feminist plays; of Monstrous Regiment, like "Kiss and Kill" by Sue Todd and Ann Mitchell, and of writers like Michelene Wandor or Caryl Churchill, where what might be called the world of imaginative fiction is being explored in original ways.

Realising the limits of theatre is part of discovering its strength. Underestimating its artistic effect while overestimating its political effect can narrow not widen the influence of the Left. This does not mean switching from a "revolutionary" to a reformist strategy, in the bad sense of the word, but understanding the nature of the political process and the place of art within it.

The issue is therefore not to find one form, but to develop the many based on strategies that take account of the commercial as well as the subsidised theatre, TV and radio, as well as rock concerts and dance, and finding ways of linking up with the political forces that can be brought into action on a range of subjects, from sexism and racism to equal pay, higher wages or the shorter working week, which will directly affect culture as workers will have more "time on their hands". Cultural activity is becoming recognised as increasingly important not just for the Left as shown in events like The People's Festival, and for wider sections with, for example, growing numbers of anti-racist carnivals, but also for the way ideological rule is won. This suggests that like all other areas, theatre work outside of the socialist touring groups must not be left without the Left.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PAPERS NO.3 JULY 1978

Theoretical Journal of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency

THE RECESSION: CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE AND THE WORKING CLASS

Tony Allen, Gareth Evans, Mike Freeman and Kate Marshall

This issue of *Revolutionary Communist Papers* provides an analysis of the crisis in Britain. It looks at the main features of the British economy and the unfolding of the crisis during the past decade. The journal examines the political development of the working class in this period. It analyses reformism in Britain and explains why the working class has accepted the Social Contract. This assessment of the experience of the recent struggles of the working class contains important lessons for the movement.

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What Energy Policy for Britain?

John Baruch

(Over the next few years, crucial decisions have to be made about Britain's future energy supplies. In the February issue of Marxism Today, *we printed an article by John Mathews entitled "The Politics of the Energy Debate" in which the author argued strongly for the non-nuclear options. We print below, as part of this discussion, an article by John Baruch which adopts a pro-nuclear stance. The author is a physicist at the University of Leeds and a member of the Yorkshire District Committee of the Communist Party.)*

The Left has always assumed that the struggle to raise living standards and improve the quality of life requires a massive increase in socially-necessary production. The 1967 and 1975 Communist Party statements on "National Energy Policy" explicitly declare that the energy policies are based on the assumption of and the need for an expanding economy. This assumption is now being questioned by socialists and others. Is this old assumption of productive growth still valid? This question is fundamental to any energy policy.

Those who oppose growth argue that the problems of the whole world achieving the standard of living of the more affluent workers of the USA, Switzerland and Sweden, are insurmountable, the world's natural resources including energy are rapidly being used up. They maintain that industrialised society pollutes the biosphere, is repressive and alienates man from his surroundings. Nuclear power is said to be a new stage of lunacy.

The limited supply of the world's natural resources, especially energy, is crucial to the case of those who argue for varying degrees of a deindustrialised society. Silver, the essential element for the photographic industry, is one of the resources nearest extinction. Current reserves are estimated to provide a maximum of 18 years' supply. Similarly there is a maximum of 17 years' supply of tin. Yet in the water of the oceans alone there is over 50,000 and 20,000 years' supply of silver and tin respectively. Of course, it is more difficult to extract minerals from sources of lower concentration and it requires more energy, but it is patently untrue that these resources are on the verge of disappearing for ever. In the long-term, access to the earth's molten core will possibly enable us to extract raw materials as we now distil petrol from crude oil. The problem of resources is not an easy one and this example does not do justice to the gravity of the situation, but solutions will be more easily found with high technology than without. This maxim applies with equal force to the irreplaceable energy resource provided by fossil fuels.

What sort of future do we want in Britain? The new programme of the Communist Party, *The British Road to Socialism*, states: "In a socialist society we will eradicate poverty" (p. 16), and "People's needs will be met by an abundance of goods and better social services" (p. 50). "Properly applied, existing scientific and technical knowledge could release people from senseless and repetitive toil, reduce working hours and provide a variety of leisure and employment possibilities" (p. 53).

Increased Output

Is it necessary to increase the output of the British economy in order to end poverty and enable human beings to realise their full potentialities, or can such aspirations be met in a deindustrialised Britain?

There are certain basic facilities, the lack of which so seriously affects the quality of life in Britain today that their provision must be a priority. These basic facilities include enough good food, housing, health, education, mobility and communications provision, and socially necessary rewarding jobs for all.

In Britain today, although no one starves, thousands of elderly citizens die of hyperthermia every winter, there are $1\frac{1}{2}$ million unemployed and millions on or below the official poverty level. Housing is the prime issue in any urban area. It is a crisis situation which can only be resolved by a massive increase in the production of building materials to build new homes and alter old ones. The required cement, bricks, paint, carpets, furniture, etc., cannot be produced without a large increase in production in many areas of the economy. Whilst it is possible to argue that with different social relationships, Chinese or Israeli type communes or kibbutzim would be desirable, such an argument is irrevelant to the reality of Britain's present housing crisis.

Health is an area where the chronic problems of our present facilities cannot be rectified without a considerable expansion and re-direction of health service facilities. A health service for the people must be directed towards preventive medicine with curative medicine as a powerful back-up. Some diseases are probably related to our lifestyle. They are still diseases, and they emphasise the need for preventive medicines. It is hardly necessary to mention kidney machines to reflect that thousands of people die every year from curable diseases. The

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appalling level of infant mortality in this country and the relatively large number of spastic and abnormal babies born could be drastically reduced by the application of modern techniques in pre-natal care. Ultrasonic scanners to look for physical abnormalities and radioactive tracers to look for biochemical abnormalities of the foetus are techniques of an industrialised society. Only an industrialised society can produce sophisticated instruments in large numbers or can manufacture the complex radioactive chemicals. The diversion of considerable resources into preventive medicine rather than the present curative medicine will require new clinics with modern equipment to be built on a massive scale. Such an expansion would make considerable demands on our economy, and health would continue to require considerable industrial back-up as modern aids would enable Britain to be in the forefront of the battle against ill-health. The level of medical care is strongly related to the industrial level of society. Consider the recent TV series on a group of people who voluntarily reverted to stone-age living. It is highly likely that twentieth-century contraceptive techniques were used! The pill and its future improvements will require an advanced pharmaceutical industry. It can be seen that without an advanced industrial society people will die who would otherwise be healthy. Are we prepared to reject the benefits of an advanced industrialised society because we are not prepared to combat the hazards it creates, alongside the benefits? Similar arguments to these apply to education, agriculture, automation, mobility and communications.

The Case Against a Deindustrialised Britain

The case against a deindustrialised Britain can be put in general terms: any society must first enable its workers to reproduce. To do this, its workers must be fed, clothed and housed. It is the surplus over and above this basic level which enables a section of the population to be healthy, cultured, educated human beings living in pleasant housing conditions, without toil, and enjoying a rich and varied interaction with their surroundings. The surplus of non-industrialised methods of production is not sufficient for many members of society to enjoy an acceptable quality of life. Chinese peasants are not content with merely a primary school education, one-roomed homes and barefoot doctors, a level of existence which is not a product of inequitable distribution, but a lack of industrial mass production. A deindustrialised society is a society of poverty in the broadest sense of the word. Twentieth-century technology can only be successfully and continuously used by twentieth-century levels of industrialisation. It is no accident that as Britain is being slowly deindustrialised by the action of the EEC and the multinational firms, that our health service is falling behind what is possible and our education system is being attacked. As factories close and dole queues lengthen a philosophy which declares large-scale industry the enemy and glorifies a simple life of poverty is a philosophy which ideologically undermines those workers who would fight against the multinationals for jobs and a decent life.

Britain in the 1970s is a great waster of energy. The burning of our fossil fuels not only removes an irreplaceable asset but produces all sorts of pollutants which affect the environment, e.g., carbon dioxide which could cause the temperature of the atmosphere to increase. Energy is not easily lost; it warms up the environment, a process which if unchecked on a global scale could melt the icecaps and cause the level of the sea to rise. For all these reasons fuel must be used as efficiently as possible.

In the production of electricity, 60 per cent or more of the energy from burning coal, oil, or from atomic fission, is dumped into the atmosphere through the cooling towers. This unnecessary loss, equivalent to all the energy provided by coal, oil and gas for domestic and industrial heating could be channelled into district heating or large-scale greenhouse farming projects. Even with considerable reduction in energy demand through the integrated use of energy, industrial production designed for use instead of profit, and savings in energy loss with suitable insulation, an expanding economy aiming to improve the quality of life in Britain would need more rather than less energy.

Future Supplies of Energy

How can we supply our energy requirements most efficiently? Does nuclear power have a place? It takes from 10 to 15 years to build a large power station. New technology can take an initial 10 to 15 years to develop. In these terms this article is concerned with British energy requirements for 1990 and beyond using present technology, and the early years of next century using new technology.

The Communist Party Energy Policy discussion document written by the Science & Technology Sub-Committee of the Party and published in January 1977, states that "a rational energy policy would take cognisance of all the available sources of energy, their advantages and disadvantages in different situations, and the possibilities of combining more than one source of supply, and maintaining as many options as possible for future choice."

There can be no doubt that the burning of fossil fuels whether natural gas, coal or oil, is a great waste of a very valuable non-renewable resource. Eventually, although our coal reserves are considerable, we will have to find another source of energy. In British latitudes, solar power is a poor source of industrial energy. Any conversion process

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can only work in the daytime when it is sunny; but solar energy can provide considerable amounts of hot water in summer. Wind power is similarly a small-scale intermittent source of energy. Energy storage from summer to winter or day to night, on a power grid scale or a roof solar panel scale, is the most intractable problem facing all energy producers. No potential solution to any of these storage problems has yet appeared.

Most of the good pumped storage sites are already being used and they have only a limited capacity. By the end of the century tidal power could provide about 5 per cent of Britain's total electricity requirements by damming the English Channel and the Solway Firth. No other sites have been seriously considered. Wave power could supply a similar amount of energy by the year 2000, and eventually all our electricity needs, but it involves enormous constructions out at sea with all the accompanying hazards. The energy output of waves is variable. For 2 per cent of the time the sea is too rough or too calm to provide energy. Hydroelectric power has been exploited almost to the limit in Britain. Geothermal energy from the earth's interior could possibly provide hot water in some areas, however the earth's crust is too thick for geothermal power or hot water to make more than a marginal contribution to Britain's energy budget.

One large-scale renewable energy sourse is provided by plants and agricultural waste. Wood could be burnt and the unused parts of plants could provide the basis for fermentation processes to make alcohol; the further decomposition of waste can also provide methane. Both methane and alcohol can be burnt or used as the basic feedstock for chemical plants. They are potentially a very important source of energy which has been run down because of the low price of oil.

Coal is one way to fuel an industrialised Britain. For coal to be viable, transport must depend upon electricity or other sources of energy because the conversion of coal to oil is very inefficient. If the conversion of coal to oil were necessary to fuel British transport, our coal supplies would not last 50 years.

Nuclear Power

The final option is nuclear power. Nuclear power provides over 14 per cent of our present electricity, and when all the nuclear power stations under construction are completed, over 20 per cent of our electricity will come from the atom.

Arthur Scargill, the Yorkshire miners' leader summarised his criticism of nuclear power at the Windscale Enquiry in the following way: "I have always been, I am, and will continue to be a passionate opponent of nuclear power in view of the appalling risk which it presents to human life and to the environment on the earth on which we live." The Scottish Campaign to Resist the Nuclear Menace (SCRAM) stated in their "Torness Declaration": "Nuclear power threatens all living creatures and their natural environment. It concentrates power in the hands of a few, necessitates a military-style secrecy, and undermines the principles of human liberty." I think these views are wrong. If they are correct, they are correct for social and political not scientific reasons.

What are the objections?

(1) Plutonium is dangerous. It is a toxic radioactive material which could be used by "terrorists" for a do-it-yourself atom bomb.
(2) The radiation risks from storing, handling and reprocessing nuclear fuel or working in or near a nuclear power station are unacceptable.
(3) Accidents in the reactor or fuel reprocessing plant involving the release of large amounts of radioactive material are bound to happen.
(4) There are risks of accidents when transporting the radioactive materials in which third parties would be injured or irradiated.
(5) Waste products, some of which would be radioactive for tens of thousands of years, cannot be acceptably disposed of.
(6) There is an extreme danger that nuclear power will facilitate the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The answers the nuclear power experts give to these objections have their limitations. How far can the experts be believed? Expert knowledge about nuclear power is made up of two parts. The accumulated published experience of nuclear power programmes in a number of countries involving many scientists and engineers; and the classified information from nuclear power for military use in weapons and warship engines. This classified information, including hazards and safety procedures, and the effects of radiation on people and the environment, is considerable but unavailable. Expert advice must be open to the widest questioning and examination, and this can only be done with public democratic procedures.

Comparing hazards is a questionable procedure but it allows the problems to be put into a sort of perspective: the factual replies to objections to nuclear power can be summarised as follows:

Response to their Objections

Plutonium is far less toxic than many chemicals in daily use that are carried in tankers on our roads. Plutonium is a useful nuclear fuel which could increase 100-fold the efficiency of our reactors. If terrorists wish to terrorise then cyanide in the water supply has been a long-standing and immeasurably more available danger than a home-made atom

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bomb. The military-style secrecy associated with nuclear power is not necessary, it undermines our democratic rights to knowledge of all aspects of nuclear power. The normal precautions for dealing with valuable but dangerous cargo is all that is required. The radiation doses for those operating nuclear plant and handling the fuel are far less than the radiation doses received by people living in areas of Britain where the rocks are naturally radioactive. The risks of accidents involving the release of radiation into the environment are kept very small by a skilled team of safety workers who continuously monitor the plants and processes. The risk of accidents which release radiation whilst the fuel is being transported are minimal. They are thousands of times less than the risk of people being involved in a crashed tanker of sulphuric acid or incinerated in an exploding train of petrol.

Nuclear proliferation is a very serious problem. The non-proliferation treaty is a great improvement if and when it is signed by all, but it can be shown that any country with university level physics and chemistry laboratories can make a bomb if they really want to.

Waste Disposal and Radiation

The most serious problems are those of waste disposal and radiation. Man-made radiation is not a new type of hazard; radiation is also a natural hazard of life. Cosmic rays from the sun and the stars produce radioactive isotopes in the rocks and in the atmosphere. Cosmic rays pass through our bodies damaging cells as they go. A cosmic ray passes through every cubic centimetre of our bodies every minute. There are also radioactive isotopes in the rocks from the formation of the earth which produce radiation. Our bodies have learned to cope with a low level of radiation, but this background radiation does produce cancers and mutations, as do many carcinogenic substances used in industry. Cosmic rays are specifically blamed for Down's Syndrome (Mongolism) in babies. All radiation is harmful, as is any exposure to carcinogens like asbestos or vinyl chloride, and so when the unavoidable background is supplemented by man-made radiation, the cancers and mutations increase.

Radiation and carcinogens are harmful to the nucleii of the body cells. The damage causes the control mechanisms of the cell situated in the cell nucleus to malfunction. Generally the cell dies. Occasionally a mutation makes the cell reproduce very rapidly, causing a cancer. Sometimes the damaged cell is a germ cell which contains the genetic information for future generations. If the nucleus of the germ cell is only partially damaged and continues to function, then the effects of the radiation or carcinogenic damage could be transmitted to future generations.

There is no reason why the radiation effects of radioactive waste should not be maintained at a minute fraction of the natural radiation background. The volume of waste from all nuclear power stations is relatively small. There are at most 30 cubic metres of spent fuel to be reprocessed every year. With current British plans to recycle nuclear fuel through Windscale and vitrify the waste, the total volume of vitrified highly radioactive waste will, by the end of the century, fill a normal-sized house.

The Main Problem: Safety

Although the volume of waste fuel is small, the radiation hazard could be present for many tens of thousands of years. The vitrification process appears to be a very stable way of chemically locking up the radioactive waste. However, if it is decided that the storage of high activity waste is unacceptable, it may be possible to deactivate it. Fission power using uranium and plutonium and fusion power where it is hoped to use the hydrogen in the sea are processes which transmute elements one into another and produce energy. It is probable that within the next 50 years similar transmutations could be done economically with radioactive waste to make it non-radioactive. Such a process can only be done on the single atom level at present, and it is not economically viable. Some research is being carried out in this field. In my view, all highly radioactive waste should be accessible, and then, if necessary in the future, it can be reprocessed into something less dangerous. Radiation is not fundamentally more dangerous than many carcinogens and toxins that are used in industry. Technically the waste can be dealt with; there is even the possibility of deactivating it. The main problem is safety. Safety is at the heart of the nuclear power debate, but safety in essence is a political issue. It is not acceptable to have public safety levels specified and operated in secret. Where the public is involved, safety must be public, be democratically controlled, and have adequate resources available.

Windscale

The Windscale Enquiry was an enormous step forward. In spite of its limitations it brought out into the open much of the debate around nuclear power. All new nuclear installations should be the subject of wide-ranging public enquiries. There is still much to be done. By far the largest amount of information on nuclear safety is owned by the military, who classify as secret all relevant information. It is intolerable that the Official Secrets Act, or bogus considerations of national security should be used to withhold information on the safe working of nuclear power plants or the effects of radiation. All relevant information should be made available to the general public without restrictions. A serious

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threat to the safety of the nuclear power industry is the drive for profit in the private sector. This threat can only be removed by the complete nationalisation of all sections of the industry.

On a local scale, every power station should have its own safety committee. This committee should be set up as soon as approval is given for the power station; it must be representative of all relevant interests, and have the right to vet all alterations in design. When the plant is operational the safety committee should have the right to close it down if it so wishes and should have access to funds to hire expert advice, and finance research into grey areas of understanding. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, there are statutory powers for the unions to set up safety committees covering all aspects of health and plant safety which are operative as from October 1 this year. Do such committees work? The report on the Windscale Enquiry by Mr. Justice Parker strongly criticised the local liaison safety committee between plant and locality and suggested its reorganisation. Pressure from the trade unions, the press and the local population should ensure that safety committees work effectively, and become accountable to all interested parties. The Health and Safety at Work Act is as yet in its infancy. It was introduced to end the scandal of four workers being killed in industry every working day, and 3,000 injured seriously enough to lose three more days from work. If there are areas where the Act does not function or where it needs enforcing, then these should be spotlighted for the labour movement to discuss and propose amendments. Initially the threshold limit values (TLV) used to limit hazards in industry could be improved. The rate of death, incapacitation, illness and discomfort which is the "safe working" norm for industry is far too high.

A Broad Campaign for Safety

The Friends of the Earth and other opponents of nuclear power should recognise safety as the issue and widen their horizons to campaign for a reduction in the threshold limit values and for public accountability of the safety committees of all factories handling unpleasant materials, including nuclear plants. Such a policy would find many trade union branches and community groups only too pleased to campaign with them to control the giants on their doorsteps and end the pollution of the environment by the noxious effluent from many industrial plants.

In the developing world the option of nuclear power is very important. For many countries it is the only way to leapfrog onto a twentieth-century industrial basis. A nuclear power station can provide large quantities of fresh desalinated water for agriculture along with the power necessary for large-scale basic industries like steel and chemicals. With such a base, electric pumps, lights, wind and solar generators, pesticides and fertilisers can be made to transform village life. Britain has a massive debt to the developing countries from years of exploitation and pillage by our imperialist rulers. Only with a continuing programme of development and manufacture of nuclear power stations can Britain not only make such power plants available to the developing countries of the world, but can also ensure her own independent energy supply. For the developing world, public accountability of their safety committees would help them to enjoy the benefits of nuclear power without the evils.

In summary: Only a high technology society under democratic control as envisaged in *The British Road to Socialism* can meet the justified aspirations of the British people, end poverty, achieve full employment with reduced working hours and improve the quality of life. Massive energy conservation measures are essential and alternative sources of energy are important for reasons of economy, diversification and conservation of energy supplies, but only coal and nuclear power can provide the base energy supplies for such a society.

I have shown that there are no insuperable barriers to the safe use of nuclear power. Fast breeders and fusion reactors have not been considered because they do not alter the basic arguments. Support for the continuing development of nuclear power in no way means reducing the contribution of coal, both are needed as well as the increased development of renewable sources of energy. In my view the slogan of democratic control of nuclear safety with public enquiries for each new station proposed, and democratic safety committees at each plant, is capable of uniting large sections of the population, including many who are in favour with those who are uncertain about nuclear power.

The demand for democratic control of nuclear safety will force many opponents of nuclear power to face the real monster—the thousands of nuclear weapons in bases across the British countryside.

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Review:

The State, The Crisis and Democratic Transition

Colin Mercer

(Below we print a discussion article on Nicos Poulantzas' two recent books. As yet, neither are translated into English, although we understand that at least one soon will be. The books are Poulantzas (ed.), La Crise de L'Etat *(Presses Universitaires de France, 1977); Poulantzas,* L'Etat, le Pouvoir, le Socialisme *(Presses Universitaires de France, 1978).)*

Nicos Poulantzas' most recent work (*L'Etat, le Pouvoir, le Socialisme*—State, Power and Socialism) represents a new departure for him in that it attempts to concentrate the results of his theoretical and analytical works on the state in a more directly *political* intervention: an attempt to engage with what he terms the *structural* distance between practice and theory. He does not abandon his theoretical formulations in order to make purely empirical observations about the present situation but both drawing on and in some cases decisively reformulating some of the theses developed in his work over the past eight years, Poulantzas' explicit aim is to intervene in "the political situation in Europe" within the general context of the struggle for a democratic socialism. This project is complementary to the more detailed and specific analyses of the state in the collective work under Poulantzas' direction which appeared last year, *La Crise de L'Etat* (The Crisis of the State). A combination then of theoretical and political objectives, mutually interdependent because if the earlier collection shows us anything, it is that there is a great deal of work yet to be done on the complex and concrete forms of domination in the advanced bourgeois democracies.

Following Gramsci's development of the concept of hegemony and the subsequent revaluation of the "superstructures" and following also Althusser's formulations of the relative autonomy of the economic, political and ideological "levels" in the social formation, the conditions for these concrete analyses are now established but, in the theory of the state at least, they are still at an early stage. It is above all Poulantzas' work, for all its shortcomings and changes in direction, that has shown that the theory of the state is a primary strategic and theoretical stake for marxists today. For if, with Poulantzas, we accept that there is no theory of the state in the "classics" of marxism and consequently no elaborated theory of transition or transitional forms, then Althusser's remarks about the "crisis of marxism" in last month's *Marxism Today* are clearly relevant. To the absence of a theory of the state at the heart of marxist theory we could add other symptoms; the lack of a theory of politics which would avoid the dangers either of voluntarism or of economic determinism, the relegation of the *nation* and national particularities to bourgeois theory, the absence of a developed theory of ideology which would go beyond the "false consciousness" approach. An understanding of the state in its multiple determinations and in its complex and differentiated modes of formation and domination, its role in the reproduction and maintenance of bourgeois hegemony, is central to all of these "absences" in marxist theory. And this of course has effects not only at the level of theory but also at the immediate level of political strategy. How we formulate our strategies with regard to the state and its apparatuses will depend upon how we conceive of it in the first place. Is it, for example, an "instrument" to be manipulated by a ruling elite? Can it therefore simply be "rescued" from them? Or on the other hand does it exist as a monolithic entity, a unified bloc to be "smashed" from without? What are its relations to the economic base, is the state simply a "front" for this and can it therefore be analysed as an "*expression*" of economic forces and relations? These are some of the problems which Poulantzas approaches and his engagement with them has productive, though in places uneven, results and implications for current communist strategy in Western Europe and elsewhere.

The Crisis of the State

These enquiries into the nature of the state do not of course take place in a vacuum. In face of the *crisis of the state* defined by Poulantzas essentially as a *condensation* of contradictions: the social consequences of increasing forms of state intervention in civil society, the tensions and conflicts provoked *within* the ruling bloc by the "economic politics" required by large-scale monopoly capital, the associated ideological crises evidenced by the

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events of 1968/69 in France, Italy, and West Germany accompanied by an increased politicisation of struggles which are not "explained" by economics—the women's movement, ecological struggles etc.—all add up to a structural or organic crisis, a crisis of hegemony, as Christine Buci-Glucksmann puts it in her article in the earlier volume. Poulantzas is quick to take his distance from fatalistic or catastrophic conceptions of this "crisis", however, and makes no facile assumptions about its outcome. The acuteness with which the crisis is felt will depend on the specific nature of each social formation and the various ways in which it is mediated. For very good historical reasons it takes different forms in France, with its traditionally more overt and repressive state forms (centralised bureaucracy, centralisation, archaic and restrictive education system, increasing use of the para-military riot police in civil and industrial disputes) than it does in England with its long established cultural and ideological "buffer" system.

Nonetheless, despite its variable national expressions, the crisis of the state has led to what Poulantzas calls the "rise of authoritarian statism"—in the decline of parliamentary and representative forms with the increased power of the executive (in France especially), the threat to democratic freedoms (*Berufsverbot* in West Germany), the establishment of institutional obstacles to popular struggles (the criminal trespass and conspiracy laws in this country). The collective volume, *La Crise de L'Etat* examines these accelerated modifications in specific areas: in relation to capital accumulation and the economic crisis highlighted by the years 1973-75, the internationalisation of capital, new forms of urban policy and the consequent contradictions between "local society" and the state, the role of high-ranking state functionaries and of the law and finally the effects of transatlantic military and security alliances upon particular social formations and their national bourgeoisies. The state is at once more extensive and more contradictory, there is a simultaneous process of strengthening/weakening and the particular forms which this process takes cannot be understood in terms of a generalisation into some amorphous and undifferentiated "conspiracy theory" of international capital. Subject to many influences and determinations, the state is easily felt but difficult to define.

Problems of Definition

Poulantzas is emphatic in his own book that there is no marxist theory of the state: a radical assertion in itself, but he says more than this. *There can be no general theory of the state in marxism* which posits it as an abstract entity or "essence" outside of its relations with specific modes of production and social formations. In the classic texts of Marx and Engels what we find are partial theorisations and fragments of definitions in relation either to predominantly economic considerations or predominantly political analyses. From the hegelian state of the early works to the politico-juridical conceptions of the political writings there is no consistently formulated theory of the state as a theoretical object subject to multiple determinations and not therefore reducible to a single principle.[1]

In Lenin we find concise *political* analyses of the state as a repressive apparatus at the expense of other determinations and even the definition of it as a "*special* machine" is inadequate. There are unevennesses and discontinuities in the marxist theory of the state and these are still reproduced today albeit in more complex ways. Antonio Gramsci's formulations on the "integral state" (coercion + hegemony) provide a more expansive definition and one which encompasses "civil society" as the sphere in which the hegemony of the dominant class is exercised. We should note however that there are also ambiguities here in Gramsci's tendency to shift from narrow definitions to the more expansive and "all-inclusive" ones. The one important modification that Gramsci adds however is that the distinction between state and civil society is a *methodological* and not organic one: depending on the forces and relations present and the economic pressures, the "threshold" between the two areas will be variable. Civil society is not "expressive" of the state, nor is it a front for it, it has its own forms and autonomy which open up contradictions between it and the state. Poulantzas' own formulations operate within this space between narrow and expansive definitions of the state.

The State as a material condensation of a relation of forces

Poulantzas' own work has been strongly influenced by that of Louis Althusser. Firmly within the althusserian problematic, he has been accused in the past of being more althusserian than Althusser for his formalism and rationalism. Poulantzas still bears the traces of this in some of his theses but he has criticised the over-functional treatment of the state represented by Althusser's important though flawed essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" where the state was described as repression plus ideology in a more or less descriptive way.

Against these rather descriptive and static categories, and against all notions of the state as monolith, instrument or essence, Poulantzas proposes a *relational theory of state power*. The state, not being an "object", does not belong to any

[1] Bob Jessup has amply demonstrated this in his paper "Marx and Engels in the State", in *Politics, Ideology and the State* (ed. S. Hibbin), Lawrence & Wishart, 1978.

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particular class: the power of the bourgeoisie is not simply "there" as an essence. Constituted over a long period, *this* state bears all the marks of a long process of struggle and negotiation. This is a historically variable process resulting in specific combinations of *nation* and *state*, depending on the economic and political forces present, and which results in specific national configurations.

Traversed by contradictions, the state is *constituted* (Poulantzas also says condensed, constellated, materialised) through the class struggle at all levels. And this struggle is not just that of the bourgeoisie and proletariat (i.e. in the constitution of classes as such) but also between fractions within the ruling bloc itself. The power of the ruling bloc does not simply adhere to the state in such a way that it could be detached in a frontal attack, it is *traced* there in contradictory ways and *materialised* in specific apparatuses and practices (cultural, familial, religious, sexual, ethical etc.). But if there is this condensation of powers, this negotiation at every level and within every apparatus, then we should stress that the resultant form is not *equal* to those powers and cannot be reduced back to them. The condensate is not equivalent to the forces because in the process of its complex formation, other determinations enter at every stage. Each form therefore gains a relative autonomy: *autonomised* from the political forces at stake, but *relatively* because of the structural constraints imposed by economic developments.

This means of course that there is no apparatus which simply "belongs" to the ruling class, but it also means that though the masses of the people are in some form present in the apparatuses, they are not there on their own terms. Present by virtue of their struggles the popular masses are simultaneously *within* the state but *excluded* from it since "it is not in the terms of their own apparatuses that these groups establish their own existence in the state (*L'E, le P, le S*, p. 157) and it is because of this, Poulantzas stresses, that we should be careful to avoid any "technocracy of the Left" which would aim merely to "manage" the existing apparatuses: from this the necessity for new *forms* of democracy articulated with existing representative forms. It is in this way that the historic continuity of the material and specific forms of the state can be challenged, simultaneously from a position *within* the state and with a perspective for establishing a new hegemony with new forms from *outside*.

The State "plus" Civil Society

One of Poulantzas' earlier and erroneous conceptions of the state could be characterised as *institutionalism*: the state as a set of *structures* reproducing the hegemony of the dominant class in the form of "dominant beliefs" and ideas. Linked with his relational concept of power is a rejection of this particular structuralist deviation towards a concept of ideology which is not a "system of ideas" but which is *inscribed in material practices*. Our common sense activities, beliefs, reactions etc., have a very material basis and are embedded in the forms of civil society—in the education system, in the family, in our very "natural" divisions between "private" and "public", "masculine" and "feminine" "intellectual" and "manual" labour. Engaging in an interesting way with the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, Poulantzas is in the process of acknowledging the real role of ideology and the role of the intellectuals in the "intellectual and moral leadership" exercised by the dominant class (Gramsci). This means that the subordinate classes are not only excluded in class or economic terms from the state but also culturally and intellectually: knowledge in Foucault's terms is closely linked with power and it is because of this, Poulantzas suggests that we should shift our attention from that "monolith" to the specific and material mechanisms in which it maintains and reproduces its cohesion and existence.

Poulantzas' engagement with Foucault and a much more thoroughgoing debt to Gramsci's work on the state and civil society are pertinent to the present conjuncture where the "threshold" between state and civil society is increasingly vague and ill-defined, leading to crises of representation and definition even at the highest levels of the state (the article by Sallois and Cretin in *La Crise de L'Etat* reveals this to be the case among the civil engineers, administrators and high state functionaries being trained in France's *Grandes Ecoles*) and one of the consequences of this is that, in spite of Giscard d'Estaing's speeches to the contrary, the French state can no longer present itself as the "state of all the people".

A Greater Autonomy

The increase in "economic politics" carried out by the state to accommodate the transformations of monopoly capital have led to divisions within the bourgeoisie itself between small and large capital, and to the increased politicisation of areas of civil society usually, and in "common sense" considered, "above" politics. These take the form of secondary contradictions and cannot be understood simply in class terms since they tend to take the form of people *versus* the state, rather than class against class. They take the form of what Ernesto Laclau has called *popular democratic struggle* which is the domain of the ideological class struggle *par excellence*.[2]

To articulate these forms of struggle with class

[2] In his book *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, NLB, 1977.

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struggle and to combine them as the representation of a *general interest* is a primary task just now being realised by communists but already formulated, albeit sketchily, by Marx and Engels.[3] A greater autonomy has to be awarded to this terrain then, the terrain of civil society, but this does not escape *overdetermination* by the class struggle: indeed it is predominantly in civil society that Gramsci's "war of position" is fought out—the crucial and decisive form of "war" in the advanced bourgeois democracies. It is these complexities that we have to pose against the "Bastille" or "Winter Palace" model: beyond the economic and class-reductionism of the Second and Third Internationals but avoiding also the French "New Philosophers" version of the intrinsically malevolent state (East and West) towards a political and theoretical understanding of the pluralist struggle for new and local democratic forms in areas where we might not previously have expected struggle to take place.

In this context we can locate the value of the concrete and specific analyses such as that provided by Manuel Castells in *La Crise de L'Etat* in a close examination of the urban contradictions engendered by the new forms of state intervention: "in a series of new contradictions related to the current phase of capitalism which also play a new role in the political class struggle" (p. 179). The state clearly has a role to play in regional distribution and the "organisation of space" to maintain and reproduce a labour force and regulate collective consumption and it is in housing policy that its interventions can be keenly felt.

The Nation and the State

The absence of a theory of the state in marxist theory is related to significant absences in other areas and Poulantzas locates the nation as of major importance here. Because it is difficult to define the nation in strictly class-terms, this particular entity has often been pushed to one side by an economistic marxism. The reconsideration of the relative autonomy of ideology and other levels can now enable us to approach this spatial and temporal relation which we call the nation in a less reductive way.

In the nation, Poulantzas stresses, there is a particular unity of the reproduction of the ensemble of social relations which is in a sense "prior" to the mode of production and cannot therefore be understood in terms of it alone. The unity designated by the word "nation" is crucially related to the capitalist state (the nation state) and has often been used, in appeals to national unity and so forth, as an effective ideological stabiliser by the forces of reaction to neutralise crises whose outcome might have been a socialist one. This does not mean though that the nation can be relegated to a necessary class or economic-belonging, since, as a complex and contradictory formation it contains elements which can be disarticulated from the hegemony of the ruling-bloc in favour of the progressive forces. This is a complex war of position since the modern nation tends to coincide with the modern state in so far as the state incorporates the nation and the nation becomes a material form in the state apparatuses.

The nation, for Poulantzas, is a *spatial matrix* in that in the distribution and definition of its territory it includes and excludes whole communities and races (or what it has defined as a community or race). It is also a *temporal matrix* in that it has its own history in which it will try to establish certain continuities and traditions to justify and naturalise its existence—the establishment of "great traditions", the censoring-out of any radical incursions which might pose a threat to its continuity (how many schoolchildren had understood the significance of the Peterloo massacre in the history books of 20 years ago?).

Economic Politics

A dominant form of more recent analyses of the state, particularly within the communist movement, has been connected with the concept of state monopoly capitalism. Poulantzas rejects this formula for its reductive "fusion" of economics and politics where the state becomes a "vehicle" for the movements of capital and if we accept the phrase "economic politics" for current forms of intervention by the state then it is important to acknowledge the specificity of both terms. The political is not "reflective" or "expressive" of the economic, and in general terms, outside of their particular location, no necessary correspondence can be established between the forms. The forms of economic politics possible within a given social formation will depend upon other political, ideological and cultural factors which go to make up *this* state. This is why crises are felt in decisively different ways in this country than in France, Germany or Italy. The peculiarly complex modes of formation of the British State, with its diverse cultural and ideological "buffer system", at once excluding any radical incursions, and absorbing or concealing the possible forms of state intervention, have led to probably the most complex and effective bourgeois hegemony of any of the European States.[4]

But if Poulantzas is careful to avoid these forms

[3] As demonstrated by Jessup, *op cit.*

[4] Gordon Robinson's article in *Marxism Today* (June) suggests some of the ways in which these concrete forms of domination might be studied in relation to the British State.

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of economic reductionism in a revision of some of his earlier positions, by introducing other determinations on the state such that it becomes autonomised and irreducible to one instance, he is also perhaps guilty of "bending the stick" too far in the other direction by over-emphasising the political determination at the expense of structural constraints imposed by the economy. Poulantzas' conception of the state as a cohering and unifying force leads to a rather hazy and undifferentiating line between state power and class power resulting in a form of voluntarism. It is perhaps due to the serious lack of a developed theory of politics in relation to a fully theorised state that Poulantzas errs in this direction; on this new ground we can expect detours and mistakes.

Passive or Democratic Revolution

Certain models of the state are paradoxically shared by the most diverse political forces. The state as instrument is central to a voluntarist conception where it can be simply manipulated or destroyed (ultra-leftism, stalinism) and also to the social-democratic conception where it can be taken over or "managed". Between Stalinism and Social Democracy, Poulantzas posits the necessity for the articulation of a dual and historically contradictory process for the democratic and revolutionary transition to socialism: "that of the transformation of representative democracy and that of the development of direct democracy at the base, the movement for democratic control" (p. 288). Poulantzas' own elaboration of this is the concluding chapter to his book, suggestive rather than formulaic, but taking as a given the absence not only of a theory of the state in marxist theory, but also of a consistent theory of the articulation of state and party: an absence which has had real and fatal effects for democratic forms in post-revolutionary societies where another form of "fusion" has squeezed out effective transformations of anachronistic state apparatuses which should have "withered away" long ago.

Combined with this perspective on the state in the socialist countries is the constant reference to the necessary new forms of democratic politics in the West now. In the face of the contradictions and fissures *within* the ruling bloc, and of a generalised crisis of the state, and given that none of this is external to us, the only way to avoid a "cure" for this crisis which would involve increasing forms of "authoritarian statism", is to prevent the existing state forms from finding their own, preferred way out of the crisis in transformations from "above"—Gramsci's "passive revolution" effected by modifications in state apparatuses without any mass involvement. To avoid this, in Christine Buci-Glucksmann's words, the left must formulate an "anti passive revolution" by realising that it is involved in the state and civil society with all its contradictions, that its involvement there and the presence of the masses *within* these complex relations necessitates complex and differentiating forms of struggle which may not always appear to be related to "class" but which are essential to that basic requirement to articulate *general* interests with class interests in order to establish hegemony in the protracted "war of position" characteristic of the modern state. It is in these terms that an analysis of the state and its specific forms represented by these two books is of major theoretical and political import.

Discussion:

Youth Unemployment

Phil Barnett

The article by Steve Munby—"Bored and Angry —The Politics of Youth Unemployment"—(*Marxism Today*, June 1978) is to be welcomed as a timely and provocative contribution to an under-examined problem.

The failings of the article are significant, in that they seem to reflect a feature general to the approach of the Left as a whole to this problem. There is a failure to develop a genuinely *strategic* outlook that can begin to transcend the usual oppositional and economistic posturings of the Left. We fail to look for points of *intervention* that we can relate closely to clear long-term goals in such a way as to create the basis for moving, in stages, towards the realisation of those goals.

The "solutions" posed by Munby are the activities of the Campaign Against Youth Unemployment (CAYU), the actual strength and significance of which he is in danger of overestimating, the implementation of a Left Alternative Economic Strategy,

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with no consideration of how it might be possible to implement it, or elements of it, the demand for various union agencies to organise the young unemployed, and a call for "mass militant struggle".

A distinctive feature of the youth unemployment problem is the national consensus that exists in favour of urgently finding solutions to it. When Munby points out the startling fact that the major political parties do not have long-term solutions to the question, but deal with it as a "moral issue", and that therefore their policies should simply be rejected, he is himself making a moralistic rather than a politically considered point. The fact that the major political forces feel compelled to attack the problem, albeit inadequately, is a measure of a degree of accountability to popular feeling and provides important space in which the Left must intervene, in an attempt to develop partial strategies into something more universal.

I share the assumption with Steve Munby that only a Left Alternative Economic Strategy will ultimately provide an overall answer to youth unemployment, and unemployment generally. Such a strategy will presumably include measures of large-scale nationalisation, the development of democratic planning and control, and the development of a planned investment policy linked to a job-creating employment strategy.

Such policies challenge important bases of political and economic power in our society. They do so by directly challenging the power of private capital, *and* by challenging many of the assumptions, ideas and values, that comprise the consent of the majority to aspects of the capitalist system.

There seems to be an unarticulated assumption, that if it were not for the distorting role of the media, and a number of "reformist" or "right-wing" Labour Party and trade union leaders, the majority would be able to agree, quite naturally, on the need for socialist policies and new forms of social organisation. This is a dangerous misconception. People are not "conned" into accepting existing social relations, but actually *live them*, the very conditions of their social existence constantly reaffirming their view of the world as the "natural" view.

A "Strategy for our Alternative Strategy"

It is necessary, therefore, to find ways of developing political practice that can enter the actual process of people's lives. We need to create a "strategy for our alternative strategy" capable of developing an intermediate level of intervention, that can find ways of building key elements of the alternative, in practice, now. This would have to involve wide sections of people in new forms of activity that acted as "bridges", leading from their old ideas and practices, over to the possibility of being able to open up to new ones.

To continue to merely proclaim the Left Alternative Economic Strategy, and wait for the waters to part, is to consign the Left to the ghetto of a permanently marginalised opposition, that refuses to intervene now in any measures aimed at dealing with youth unemployment that fall short of a full socialist alternative. This condemns the unemployed to remaining at the mercy of the state while on the dole queue, until such times as a Left government is elected, to implement a Left Alternative Economic Strategy from above.

A major contradiction implicit in that position, is that the movement towards the election of a Left government, is made less likely by the present refusal of the Left to find methods of testing the basis of its policies in practice, in ways that begin to break popular consent, preferring to remain in privileged opposition, enjoying a small measure of influence and no responsibility.

"Bridges" to a left alternative can be constructed around activity against youth unemployment, by grasping the enormous possibilities offered to an "interventionist" Left by the Manpower Services Commission's Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP).

A strategically developed approach to YOP could create the basis for a broad alliance between the labour movement, sections of youth, educationalists and parts of the community never before involved in any kind of "struggle". Furthermore, the Labour Movement, with the correct strategy, could be placed to become the dominant hegemonic force in those alliances.

The Youth Opportunities Programme

What is the problem that YOP is trying to deal with? What is YOP, and how will it function?

Munby amply illustrates the size of youth unemployment. It is particularly intractable because it is now a structural feature of the British economy. If and when overall unemployment falls, youth unemployment will remain proportionately high. This is largely due to the fact that the nature of employment is changing drastically. Industry is becoming more specialised and automated as well as more sparse, and requires a smaller, more highly skilled workforce. The types of jobs traditionally available to school leavers with low qualifications are simply no longer in existence. As a result, people leaving school with good qualifications are taking jobs below their previous expectations, when they can get them, and graduates often find themselves in jobs previously taken by "A" level holders. This rounding down process has been the result of the virtual elimination of the unskilled level of employment, and has hit the lowest educational achievers the hardest of all. The YOP will provide training

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courses for 240,000 young people a year. Courses will last for up to a year, and a weekly grant of £19.50 is available for course participants. Courses will take the form of work experience on employers' premises, college courses, community service, and combinations of these.

The YOP will be administered by a central management board, drawn from the TUC, the CBI, the world of education and the youth service. This will co-ordinate the programmes of 28 area boards, each of which will have a great deal of autonomy to design courses suited to their particular area. These boards will be able to involve a wide range of interests in their activity, and will be encouraged to foster the development of sub-area board level of organisation, to become involved in assessing and planning for the needs of particular localities.

Furthermore, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) is financing a project to be run by the British Youth Council, that aims to set up "Youth Forums" in four areas of the country, which will aim to draw together all youth organisations in order to popularise and evaluate the YOP schemes operating in their areas.

The possibility for intervention, therefore, clearly exists. We must begin to form durable alliances, which can develop further over time, by enabling convergence to take place around a programme for education and training which could be brought into a relationship with the MSC.

Demands

Such a programme will necessarily have much regional variation, but a basis for a series of demands could be as follows:—

1. To ensure that YOP courses (especially those that take the form of work experience on employers' premises) are genuinely beneficial to young people, and not merely a form of cheap labour for the employers, attention must be paid to *curriculum*. Clearly, trade skills need to be taught, and their *effective* development must be guaranteed by trained teachers being involved with students on work experience.
2. To ensure that the skills developed in young people are widely applicable, and not just suited to a narrow band of local employers, thought must be given to ways of using this vocational training to develop *cognitive and analytic skills*, which will enable the young people to transfer their particular trade skills to other situations, and to develop them. This might entail devising a "common core" of transferable skills, that could be developed "across the curriculum", rather than as a separate subject through the vehicle of the wide range of craft subjects. Such transferable skills, including primarily the skill of transfering, might be best developed through particular teaching methods. Thus, we might argue for the extension of training workshop provision in which young people not only learned how to operate machines, etc., but in which they could, under supervision, be responsible for its entire functioning—dealing with the purchase of raw materials, the organisation of production, the drawing up of instructions for their tasks and even the selling of goods they produced.
3. We must find ways to enable YOP participants to use their YOP courses as a route into further education and training. This might be done by developing a system of credit transfer between YOP and existing courses, or by developing a new level of course.
4. The young unemployed are isolated from each other, from the rest of their generation, and society at large. They have no democratic channels through which they can be effective in controlling or changing aspects of their lives. There is a danger that as a group, they may become permanently estranged from society's democratic institutions.

   The YOP courses will, for the first time, bring large numbers of young unemployed together. The opportunity will therefore exist, and must be taken, of developing an autonomous organisation for YOP participants, within the programme itself, that can represent them, and develop their collective power within the MSC. The experience of self-organisation and democratic practice and effectiveness should be seen as essential elements of the educational content of YOP courses.

The Planning Process and Alliances

Beyond this, the opportunity to develop the planning process as a whole must be seized. Labour Movement involvement in local schemes could ensure that provision of YOP courses corresponded to a profile of local employment needs, that if formulated, would have to begin to plan what type of local industry was necessary and desirable, and what relationship employment and training have to other areas of policy. Alliances around that planning process could begin to significantly shift the balance of politics in localities, and win a new role of genuinely political leadership for the trade union movement.

The long-term implication of developing such planning cannot be in doubt. Two quotations from a booklet issued by the Tower Hamlets Training Forum, which was set up to develop a strategy for training in Tower Hamlets, illustrate the point:

> "A trained workforce is, of course, not enough by itself. Indeed, it cannot be emphasised too strongly, that other policies, pursued at both national and local level, are central to reviving the

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local industrial base. Proper training provision is only one part of a wider policy to stop the shattering outflow of jobs from the Borough, and to ensure its long term development."

In discussing the role of the local council the pamphlet notes:

"The council have also got a central role, both as employer, and as local planning authority. We have suggested that the council could act as a co-ordinating body for training, since it is able to bring together representatives of 'providers' and 'consumers'. Training provision must also be related to the long term economic development plans of the Borough, and here again the council should have a central role."

Democratic Struggle and the Labour Movement

The pivotal position of education and training becomes clear. Proposals to transform local councils into comprehensive planning agencies, and the development of overall strategies for localities, are invaluable steps towards achieving a key principle of the Left Alternative Economic Strategy—the development in practice of democratic planning and control.

The substance of a major part of the "struggle" must be to come to grips with the educational and training needs of the young unemployed, and to generate and implement a concept and practice of democratic struggle that can develop the capacity of the working class and labour movement to unify and lead other social forces, around this and other questions. To fulfil this role it is necessary to develop and implement concrete alternatives, even if they fall short of full socialist programmes.

Such developments open the way towards a Left Alternative Economic Strategy. Clearly other strands of a strategy have to be developed, in the field. For example, of actually creating employment. However, we ought to admit that it will be a long time before this is possible.

Communists must move away from merely "proclaiming" "demanding" and "exposing", and towards coming to grips with strategy, intervention and alliances.

Discussion:

British Road or National Roads? Hard Choices Ahead

Martin Gostwick

Great dangers of isolation and ineffectuality could threaten our Party if we were to commit ourselves to an unqualified defence for the foreseeable future of the Union of nations constituting Great Britain, as I believe Comrade Bert Pearce set out to do in "Devolution, Democracy and Socialist Advance" (*Marxism Today*, December 1977).

Comrade Pearce wants to maintain the Union of Great Britain at all costs, now in the era of its domination by monopoly capital, in the future period of left governments initiating a transition to Socialism, and beyond to the age of fully developed Socialist society. He rules out the possibility that Scotland and Wales could become independent nation states at any of these three stages.

These propositions are not stated in Comrade Pearce's essay in the way I have outlined them, but I believe they are the clear inferences to be drawn from key passages in his text which I pick out here.

He says, unarguably, that: "The fundamental problem for the people [note, not peoples] of Wales, Scotland and England is that real power rests not in the hands of the people, nor of Parliament, but in the gigantic aggregations of financial and industrial ownership."

But he goes on, much more arguably, to contend that: "The struggle for national rights and for progress and Socialism can effectively combine and reinforce each other within a multi-national state. In Britain today, it is clearly in our best interests for the rapid achievement of Socialism . . . to maintain and strengthen our unity."

The problem with this proposition is that while Comrade Pearce is entirely right to insist on maintaining and strengthening unity as between the English, Scots and Welsh peoples, he believes this can only be done through retaining the multi-national state, i.e. the Union of England, Scotland and Wales making up Great Britain, and conversely that any other solution would disrupt and weaken

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this unity. He equates absolutely, advancing the unity of the peoples with the continued existence of the Union of Great Britain. Union and unity are treated as inseparable, one and the same thing.

Comrade Pearce can cite worthy examples of such supra-national solidarity manifesting themselves now, as at Grunwick and in the fight against racism (or for UCS and the miners against the Tory government in the early 70s) as evidence that overall struggle can and does take place for "political change in Britain as a whole", but he omits taking into account that there are unfortunately many more examples of competition and conflict when it is a question of fighting as rivals for crumbs from the table of the monopolies and their State. I believe that the possibilities for mutual class help and reconciliation of conflicting interests can grow and multiply the further each people and nation can march in opposition to the monopolies and their State toward full, independent self-government.

Soviet Unionism a model for Britain?

However, from his viewpoint of "Unionised unity", Comrade Pearce, suggests not only preserving the monopolists' State in its present form, but also that in the future stage of transition to Socialism "only a united (i.e. Unionised) Britain, given a Government and Parliament pursuing Socialist policies, would be best placed to take over the massive organisations of monopoly finance and industry, to use the total resources of Britain's economy to the best advantage, advancing the harmonious development of all the nations and regions to the fullest extent."

Since he wants the centralised State to dominate the direction of transition to Socialism, it follows logically that Comrade Pearce can declare that "to recognise the right to self-determination does not at all mean that it is always and everywhere essential or progressive to opt for the separation of each nation into its own national state." He is saying, but not in so many words, that the option of independence could not be "essential or progressive" for Scotland and Wales.

So what role will the Scottish and Welsh national assemblies have to play in the present struggle against monopoly, and in the future, when, according to his programme, the left government and left-majority Parliament at Westminster are directing the fundamentals of their nations' economic and social development for them?

Comrade Pearce says: "Whether in today's struggles or in a future Socialist Britain, I think we can see a vital role for such assemblies in securing the most effective interplay of centralised planning and local needs, and popular initiative. . . ."

This approach seems in fact to be an adaptation for "Great Britain" of the Soviet model for the centralised control and direction by the Soviet state of the republics forming the USSR, an arrangement, says Comrade Pearce, which, "whatever problems and imperfections or distortions may have taken place", provides in its planned advance, industrially, socially and culturally, of the nationalities within the USSR "one of the most powerful demonstrations of the potential for human advance within Socialism, and one of the basic foundations of the strength of the Soviet Union."

Such an assessment may or may not be correct of the Soviet resolution of the national question, but I do not feel that it is an appropriate model for the British Isles, where a substantial minority in Scotland and Wales already desire the fullest political expression of nationhood, the independent nation state, and an actual majority, at least in Scotland, want to see the maximum degree of devolution, as free as possible from the centralised authority of the British state; these national movements will naturally wish to see genuine autonomy extended in the future Socialist society, not curbed to conform with the requirements of even a well-intentioned "Great British" state.

Or is separate development right?

It is in his perspective for the British State's future that, in my view, lies the deepest contradictions undermining Comrade Pearce's programme for winning Socialism in our three nations. He appears to envisage devolution as "reinforcing" the present Unionised State, and ultimately as the servant of a Socialist "Great British" state, rather than accepting that the process of increasing self-government is a path of advance logically leading to the separate development of each nation by its own people, whose mass movements and governments would not be bound together by an enforced unification and an imposed overall plan, but would voluntarily collaborate and co-ordinate each other's economic and social development to the benefit of all.

It is a pity Comrade Pearce does not see it this way, for earlier, in his article's excellent preamble on the relations between Socialism and Nationalism, he has supported such voluntary unification of nations as a general principle: "While our aim is the unity of working people of all nations . . . the road to such unity can only be *through the fullest independence, self-determination and voluntary unification of peoples*" (my italics).

Why is this not applicable then to England, Scotland and Wales?

Again, in a very penetrating observation, he has noted it is futile to restore artificial models of nationhood which have long since disappeared, but warns of "the far more dangerous (and prevalent) attempt to issue premature death certificates, or even

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encourage nations into their allegedly overdue graves, *in the name of some existing unification which owes more to imperialism's world structure than to any democratic or socialist ideals*" (my italics).

Is this not a splendidly accurate definition of how the Union of Great Britain was created, with the annexation of Wales and Scotland to the English realm as the first stages in the building of the British Empire; is it not also a good description of a Union which the State sustains today as the residual power-base of British imperialism?

Problems of "Britishness", and the validity of "separation"

True, indeed, no democratic or socialist ideals, but their opposites, built the Union with fire and sword, and today the multinationals and monopolies use it as a principal instrument for their economic domination of Britain, as well as for maintaining their ideological near-hegemony through the repulsive mythology of the Crown-as-unifier, the universal imposition of the "Queen's English", and a "British" cosmopolitan culture.

That the powerful tug of this imperially-founded "Britishness", or "Great British chauvinism", as some call it, has percolated deeply into the thinking of our own Party is evidenced not only in Comrade Pearce's preference for a Unionised Britain, even under Socialism, but in the detail of his arguments, such as in the acceptance of the classical English-bourgeois view of Wales's annexation by the English Crown in 1536 as merely formalising an all-but completed incorporation; there is also the extraordinary reference to national consciousness having been "diverted" into nationalist political parties. In this conception there is only one "British" people, one "British" working class, one "British" labour movement, around which "all the genuine forces of democratic patriotism" in England, Scotland and Wales must be rallied and united. Genuine democratic patriots, it seems, are confined to those who think of themselves as "British" first, and Scots, Welsh or English second.

Under the spell of this "Britishness", we have already lost far too much of our true histories and diversity as peoples. Of course many, many thousands of English, Scots and Welsh, as well as our citizens from the former empire becoming one with us while protecting what they wish of their original, distinctive cultures, are tied together by cherished bonds of blood and of solidarity with each other; we are bound together by road, rail and air, by employment in great industries as well as by friendship.

However, Comrade Pearce's Unionism seems to confine his support for national self-determination to a limited democratic, but not major economic influence in the battle against monopoly. This Unionism reflects a deep ambivalence in the Party's attitude to devolution and its objectives. On the one hand, he favours maximum attainment of national rights to self-determination, but on the other he wants to retain the multi-national state in overall direction and control of all three countries. The basis of this dichotomy, this dilemma of what are two contradictory goals, lies in the belief that monopoly power can only be conclusively contested and defeated in favour of Socialism in Britain at the level of the British State and its Westminster government and parliament. Thus the assemblies can merely play a supporting role, "combining with and reinforcing" the main battle, which is to win "a new kind of left Labour government at Westminster." That is, indeed, the central thrust of the Communist Party's revised programme for the British Road to Socialism. But the new BRS also says the assemblies "should have adequate rights and powers to enable them to meet the national aspirations of the people, increase their democratic control and develop their economies." Unfortunately, the new BRS does not spell out what it means by "adequate" powers, beyond saying, significantly, that they should be executive and legislative, nor does it delineate what capacities it conceives the assemblies could and should have to develop their nations' economies; nor has any of the Party's other campaigning literature done so, that I have ever seen, in spite of the oft-asserted need for the labour movement throughout the British Isles to become the champion of national rights.

Is this because we do not know, or are not sure of what the assemblies could do in challenging the monopolies and their State?

Yet we can all appreciate, I would think, that Labour has been the majority party in both countries for decades, with a mass vote containing a stronger backbone of Socialist motivation and ideology than most areas of England; that Communist people and policies are an integral part of the labour movement's thinking and way of life and action in some South Wales valleys, and parts of Scotland's West Central industrial belt such as Fife and Clydebank; that a substantial working class element in the national movements can be won for left policies; and, therefore, that prospects can legitimately be held out for winning left majorities in the assemblies' committed to the maximum possible extension of the assemblies' economic control and to the development of democracy in local government, in industry and in all areas of public life.

Self-determination's great expectations

Our Party leaders in Scotland and Wales have on occasion led us to entertain some great expectations for the assemblies. Comrade Jack Ashton told the 1976 Scottish Congress of the Party that: "Mass

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class struggle and the participation of the left can turn it (the Scottish assembly) into a vehicle which can become a potent force for the left, an assembly which can become an ally of the labour movement—*an assembly which can open up a new dimension of class struggle against monopoly power*" (my italics).

Is this a prospectus that could honestly be held out in the short-term for the Westminster Parliament in relation to Britain as a whole? Is it not on the cards that such a Scottish assembly could force the pace in the struggle against monopoly, at least in Scotland, its majority uniting, mobilising and leading the offensive to reverse the nation's long decline, with inspirational value for the movement in England?

The point here is that if we are to win, as we must, left majorities in the assemblies to carry out such policies, then we shall inevitably be going a long way down the road of a devolution which is not a complementary sideshow "reinforcing" the battle for power at Westminster, but a struggle for Socialism in Scotland and Wales which is particular to their countries' conditions, traditions, needs, customs and expectations. We should be embarked, willy nilly, on *national* roads to Socialism appropriate for England, Scotland and Wales, rather than the path of seeking an overall "British" road, applicable with minimal variation, primarily through the Westminster government and parliament. The dormant "English dimension" would come to the fore under the impetus and example of changes initiated and struggled for by the assemblies, and the State would be progressively decentralised as we drove against monopoly in differing ways on differing fronts, with the common aim of overthrowing capitalism but with distinctive national paths of transition in the next stage of progress to Socialism.

Independence—if, and not yet

This course would inevitably meet with continuous fierce resistance from the monopolies and their government, whether Tory or Right Wing Labour, at Westminster, followed possibly by a head-on constitutional confrontation, to defeat which the three peoples would certainly need to be united. It could be, and I say no more than could be, that at a certain stage in this process, it would be both "essential and progressive" for the parliaments of Scotland and Wales to seek their independence as nation states, as a means of accelerating the demise of the still monopoly-dominated State using its might to deny them the goals they seek.

Obviously we cannot support independence for Scotland and Wales now, as an immediate goal, when, as Comrade Pearce rightly points out, all real power rests in the hands of the multinationals and monopolies, who could use their economic stranglehold to tear apart the industrial fabric of small nations which did not call their tune, or alternatively intensify their domination through a quiescent, petty bourgeois-led regime. But my view is that, as a logical back-up to our policies for maximum devolution, and to meet the contingencies of a constitutional crisis outlined above, we should endorse independence as an option in reserve, under the formula: "Independence—if, and not yet."

To sum up: Either we are to be an out-and-out, permanently Unionist party, in which case our advocacy of strong assemblies, and abstract recognition in principle of a right to independence, will be mere lip service, or, if we follow the lines of development for these Parliaments suggested in the statement above of Comrades Ashton for example, including my formula for conditional endorsement of independence, we would ourselves become a nationalist Party, accepted by the peoples of Scotland and Wales as genuine champions of national rights. This is the choice to be made.

Anti-nationalist follies

And we must make that choice, or face the dangers of ineffectuality and isolation on the national question that I spoke of in the beginning. Already, these dangers were apparent in Comrade Pearce's hostility to the nationalist parties, where we have many potential allies. He picked out the most reactionary attitude to be found in the nationalist ranks—crude identification of "the enemy" as "the English"—in order to discredit all of them; he accused the Nationalist parties of trying to "destroy" Labour in Scotland and Wales, after admitting a swing to them of ex-Labour voters disillusioned with successive Labour governments' failures to tackle their nations' disproportionate sufferings in unemployment, industrial backwardness and social decay; condemned them for "moving towards the separatism and division of the British working class", when the very existence of growing national consciousness, not to mention their own TUC and trade union movements, and future assemblies, has already divided the class into its separate national components (without in any way depriving them of the capacity to unite as a class). In Garscadden, Scottish comrades spoke of the result as "bursting the nationalist balloon." True, SNP proffers capitalist policies and pie-in-the-sky promises, but that should not mean we alienate ourselves from and confuse their working-class supporters, and Plaid Cymru's, by such short-sighted emnity toward their parties, when we could ally with them and lead them with a clear, Socialist perspective for national advance. When will our Parties produce "practical plans" for Scotland and Wales containing that perspective?

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Discussion:

The Lessons of France

Grahame Lock

Marxism Today published in its June number extracts from the speech of Georges Marchais, General Secretary of the French Communist Party, to the Central Committee meeting of April 26-28, which dealt with the situation arising out of the French election result. The editor of our British journal thus correctly estimated that this situation, and the response of the French Communist Party, is of importance *to us, too*. And since I agree on this point, I want to make some further comments on the question in order to try and establish just *why* it is important for British Communists not to shy away from an analysis of events in France.

The editorial comments preceding the extracts mention the fact that "two prominent Communist intellectuals, Louis Althusser and Jean Elleinstein, also wrote articles in the French paper *Le Monde*. This is true, but could be misleading. For it must be added that they were far from alone! *Le Monde* itself (not to speak of other newspapers and journals) had, in the two months or so following the election defeat, received some hundreds of letters and articles sent in by members of the French Communist Party. Three hundred members of the Party—by no means exclusively intellectuals—signed a petition, moreover, expressing their "astonishment at a number of formulae and assertions contained in Georges Marchais' report", and in particular at the distorted manner in which they considered that the critical remarks of a number of Communists (like Althusser and Elleinstein, but also including Party officials and "ordinary" workers) had been represented in the report. By the beginning of June the number of signatories to the petition had swollen to more than a thousand.

But this petition represented only a superficial aspect of the problem. For there is widespread dissatisfaction inside the French Communist Party, not only on account of the election defeat, but because of the apparent complacency with which the Party leadership responded, refusing *any responsibility whatever* in the defeat: "no error has been committed", argued Marchais, due to a straying from the line defined in the Common Programme, "and none that could hinder its success" (*Marxism Today*, June, p. 192).

It is not for the British Communist Party or its theoretical and discussion journal to try to resolve the problems encountered by the French road to socialism. But our Party does discuss the affairs of other Parties (notably the Soviet and Czech, etc.) and sometimes even takes official positions on this or that question of their political practice. And in this respect it must also be of interest to British Communists to study the treatment accorded to those members of the PCF who, for differing reasons, could not agree that "no error" had been committed by their Party with regard to the period leading up to the election defeat.

It ought first to be pointed out that the criticism levelled at certain Party members for having published their views in the "bourgeois press" (something which was, however, pioneered by the Party *leadership* long ago: British Communists may for example remember the famous interview with Maurice Thorez published by *The Times* of London in 1946) can only be understood against the background of the refusal of the French Party to open any discussion forum in its press. It is *this decision* —which the *Morning Star* (26/4/78) wisely called "controversial"—that lies at the root of what Roland Leroy, editor of *L'Humanité*, thought it right to call a "fractional enterprise directed against the Communist Party, its policy, principles and leadership",[1] and what the same paper later named, more strongly still, an "enterprise directed against the Party from the outside".[2] A contribution published in the same issue even referred to certain persons who "still *claim* to be Communists", but are in reality engaged in a "demolition exercise", presumably of the Party itself.

"No party is more democratic than ours," said Georges Marchais in a recent interview (*L'Humanité*, 24/5/78). And if that is indeed so, perhaps little difficulties like the above are not so very important. For what matters is that the Party should be close to the people, and—given that those who are closest of all to the people know best what the latter are thinking and demanding—that it should encourage discussion and initiative among its militants in the branches. But here the matter becomes quite confused! For *what is* this democracy which the Party exemplifies? Gaston Plissonnier explains (in *L'Humanité* of 31/5/78) that it consists for example in the thorough-going discussion which takes place before each Congress. Now we know that the last (22nd) Congress was distinguished by its spectacular

[1] *L'Humanité*, 29/5/78.

[2] 5/6/78.

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abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, considered rightly or wongly by many commentators as one of the most important obstacles to the democratisation of the Party. But how was this decision taken? Or, more exactly, how was the whole set of decisions taken by the Congress arrived at? Plissonnier tells us: "4,968 amendments were presented by the sections to the federal conferences", of which 828 were transmitted to the National Congress", amendments concerning the Draft Resolution presented to the Party for discussion some months before the Congress. He forgets to add, however, a small but not insignificant point: *that not one of these amendments was adopted*! The *final* Resolution accepted by the Congress was precisely the *Draft* Resolution, word for word, comma for comma. And it was of course adopted *unanimously*: among the many hundreds of delegates, not one apparently thought that a single comma was out of place. This 22nd Congress of the French Communist Party, which abandoned the old "dogma" of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", thus distancing itself even more firmly from the Soviet Party, functioned, paradoxically, in the purest "Soviet" manner. Has this fact, perhaps, something to do with its present difficulties?

The point which concerns British Communists in this connection is that, here too, the Party has something to learn, collectively, about inner-party democracy. It *is* learning. It *is* advancing. It is also, as I mentioned, expressing its opinion of certain aspects of the functioning of other Communist Parties—in the USSR and elsewhere—for their suppression of essential liberties and their sometimes scandalous treatment of their own members. Must we—on the grounds that the French Communist Party is not (yet) in power—suspend our critical judgement with regard to its activities, hiding behind the "principle" (clearly often ignored in practice) of "non-intervention" in the affairs of fraternal parties?

But there is more in the French situation, as evoked in Georges Marchais' report, which is of importance to us.

Conflicts and Contradictions

In a recent article[4] Etienne Balibar has identified three aspects of the contradiction in the French Communist Party revealed rather than created by the election defeat. The *first* concerns the definition of the class enemy. One example: the anti-monopoly alliance should "in principle" include the owners of small and middle-sized enterprises. But these enterprises, though indeed squeezed by monopoly capital, are often among the most oppressive exploiters of the working class. How is a Communist to explain to workers employed in such an enterprise what they may very well see as a refusal by the Party—on the grounds of its theory of "State Monopoly Capitalism"—to give them full and *unqualified* support in any struggle with the bosses? It is clear that this situation is causing difficulties and differences among Communist militants.

Secondly, the attempt of the Communist Party and CGT (Trade Union Federation) to recruit among managerial and technical staffs (on the basis of the same theory) has often posed a problem, both among workers, who—sometimes with good reason—tend to regard such individuals as representatives of the bosses, and for the Party itself, faced with the fact that the militancy of these sectors is often related precisely to their desire to defend salary differentials and privileges.

Thirdly, the members of the Party are obviously not unanimous in their attitude to the USSR. Many still consider it a form of treachery to express any substantial criticism of the Soviet system, while others want to go even further in its *condemnation*, drawing for this purpose on the general fund of liberal ideology and in particular on the juridical rather than political notion of "human rights".

Now it is obvious that all three of the above-mentioned contradictions have their parallels in the British situation. In the last case this is very clear, and known to every British Party member. But it is also true with regard to the other cases. In Britain too difficulties arise with regard to the winning and mobilisation of the managerial and technical strata, especially in connection with the question of the basis and function of their unionisation. This problem has bearing for example on the policy and activity of Communist Party members in unions like TASS, ASTMS, etc. And it cannot be solved by an abstract reference to the essential unity all those groups having a supposed "objective interest" in the struggle against "State Monopoly Capitalism". Finally, the first point referred to is also of great importance in Britain. Is it not striking—to take only one example—that the (doubtless justified) attention paid to the Grunwick struggle has not prompted any discussion in the British Party concerning the possible inadequacy of this notion of State Monopoly Capitalism as a basis for (but is it not more like a *substitute for*?) concrete analyses of the very complex and contradictory relations of class antagonism in present-day Britain?

For all these reasons I welcome the publication of the extracts from Georges Marchais' speech in the theoretical and discussion journal of our Party. For it *is* of interest to us; and if it is of interest to us, then it is also of interest for us to *discuss* it, what it says (and what it does not say), and the circumstances which surround it. And luckily we have a discussion journal for just that purpose.

[4] "La Responsabilité des Communistes", in *Dialectiques*, Paris, no. 23, 1978.

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